

GTA: EPISODES XCOM ARMA II: OPERATION ARROWHEAD

# TRUTH FIRST



Combine deceptive strategies to conquer the battleground



Quickly zoom from the tactics board



Outwit online adversaries in multiplayer and co-op modes













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# INSUALTY OF WAR





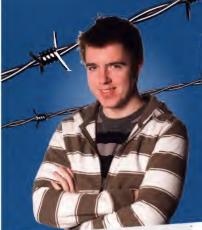
hides R.U.S.E. PC Game d SteelSeries Xai Laser Mouse



AVAILABLE







# ontents In this issue of the UK's best PC mag...

# VIET CONGBIES

SYCHIC POWERS ARE dangerous things, mystic and ancient abilities that are bestowed only upon a precious few individuals. Those deigned to bear the cross of premonition must also suffer its adverse effects.

Hear this, I knew there would be a new Call of Duty game. And, oh ... ooof... I'm getting another one... yes, here it comes. Nyuuurgh, oh god, I've just predicted Call of Duty 8. And what appears to be, yes, Call of Duty 9. They come in pairs, these premonitions.

So it's Call of Duty: Black Ops then, from the unfairly maligned "other" Call of Duty studio Treyarch. Activision leaked the name once last year, and yet again two weeks before this issue went on sale, but here it is for a third time anyway - surprise!

What you won't have seen anywhere else though, are bona-fide details. We've got locations, we've got factions, we've got multiplayer, we've got guns and screenshots and more. And coming from the studio that popularised Nazi Zombies in gaming (and somehow still carry the reputation of a second-rate developer), Call of Duty: Black Ops has us more than a little bit excited. Just think of all the different kinds of zombies there'll be: Viet Cong zombies, Communist zombies and every kind of zombie in between. There'll probably even be single-player too.

**Steve Hogarty Acting Editor** 

steve.hogarty@futurenet.com

**COVER STORY** The most epic Call of Duty yet runs the course of the



whole Cold War. Get a taste of what's to come inside.



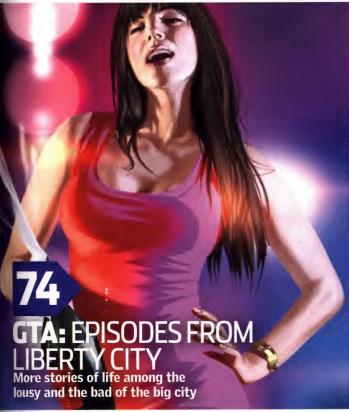




Save 25% and get a Mionix gaming headset See page 62







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Too busy? PC ZONE in 7 words...





# **FREEWARE**

This month slice up circles, jump around a tower, go insane in a dungeon, and play with your size.



# **BRITAIN'S BEST**



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Closing date: 23 June, 2010. Full offer details on page 62.

# Meet The Tea

Magazine may contain DNA traces of the following...



### **WILL PORTER**

Prince of freelance **AGE** 30 LIKES Being at home **DISLIKES** Going to Whitney Houston concerts **FANCIES** Beer **FAVOURITE GAME** Fallout (original) NOW PLAYING BioShock 2

Will is an intense twitterer. To give you an idea of just how intense, here's a day in his life: "I played through *The Passing* thinking about what an awesome map it'll be in Versus." "I'm fairly sure it had a cameo from Mike Skinner, The Streets bloke, at the start too. Or am I going mad?" "Feeling oddly nostalgic for the 1940s. This happens to me sometimes. They all look so happy! Back off Adolf!" You see: The Passing, The Streets and Hitler - what a fantastic stream of consciousness.



# JON 'LOG' BLYTH

Archduke of freelance

One of the few men we know who has a dress and a papier maché head just lying around their flat, in case of emergencies. Face it: we live in modern times.

**NOW PLAYING GTA: Episodes** 



# **EDWARD FENNING**

Workie the second

The curious thing about Mister Fenning was, of course, the fact that he hovered about half an inch above the floor at all times. It was a subtle, but horrific effect.

NOW PLAYING Plain Sight



## **STEVE HOGARTY**

The Man

"This issue will be great," said Steve. "It would take a volcano to mess up my plans for this issue. No, I haven't seen the news. Why?" **NOW PLAYING Splinter Cell:** Conviction



### **DAVID BROWN**

The Adolescent

While Steve monologued about **Dwarf Fortress** David countered with tales of UFO: Enemy Unknown, and rants about the new XCOM. NOW PLAYING

Left 4 Dead 2: The Passing



# **JAMES IRELAND**

Workie the first

The curious thing about Mister Ireland was his robotic left arm, which, unbeknownst to the workie, would smash desks as he passed them by. A destructive young man. **NOW PLAYING Dwarf Fortress** 



### STEVE HILL

Wizard of freelance

Look at cheeky Steve Hill, he's showing you his middle finger as if to say "look, I don't appreciate you taking this photograph of me, so why don't you just sod off."

NOW PLAYING SBK X

WHAT'S HELPED THIS MONTH... an extra few days to sit around and twiddle our thumbs, sorry we're late everyone WHAT HASN'T HELPED THIS MONTH... Icelandic volcanoes stranding games in Europe, yeah, let's blame that

# WHAT WE'VE BEEN TALKING ABOUT...

INFINITY WARD #1 43mins Start counting now because.

THE ELECTION Bloody hours Hey, we're political.

ACTIVISION 23mins \*slow applause\* Well done chaps. Very well done chaps. Very, very well done. Very, very, very well done.

**DOCTOR WHO 3min** Face it – those free games will be pants.

DAILY MAIL 4min Once you get the joke, it's really rather funny

SPOTIFY 83min It's got 87 variations of Baby Elephant Walk.

THE PASSING 13min It's free for us - take that up the arse Xboxers!

JENNIFER TOLSTOY 8min We're card-carrying Jennifans. Check out the Back Page.

JAPANESE COSPLAY 27min Where geekdom, OCD and tailoring meet.

INFINITY WARD #2 43mins ...by the time you get here, another dozen quit.



THE HIGHLY-ANTICIPATED MULTIPLAYER SEQUEL TO MOUNT & BLADE

# Mount Colade WARBAND



GAMEPRO ★★★★

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# Letters

Steve Hogarty braves a deluge of digital correspondance, and for what? This?









# **DRM ROLL**

In response to Lee Curran's DRM concerns (Beat the DRM, issue 220), two thoughts spring to mind: 1. PCZ's argument that review scores should not reflect DRM because the DRM may have changed in six months is unconvincing. If there are features which suck the fun out of playing a game, (e.g. poor AI, uneven game balancing, being too short) then all



these issues affect the games review score, yet all of them might be fixed free of charge within six months. If DRM is sucking the fun out of a game then please be consistent and factor it into the review score.

2. Log's infamous "it's not all kicks in the dick" review of Assassins Creed 2 read like an attempt at balanced journalism, but left me thinking "Cloud saves are irrelevant. No disc play and no install

limits are both artificial limitations which have been replaced by something far worse." These are not positive features. I have to agree with Lee, it feels like PCZ could take a stronger stance in favour of legitimate gamers.

or more on DRM, glance at page 30.

# KING OF LETTERS

# **DOING THE CAN-CAN**

Hello! I saw in your "This month PC ZONE saved money by.." section that Log bought a can of Relentless. I thought to myself, "What a perfect excuse to go out and buy lots of cans of energy drinks, drinking them and doing something with them for PC ZONE, so see the included photos."

The photos feature PC ZONE spelt out in Relentless and Monster Cans with a Monster Energy shot as a full stop, and a big energy drink tower. I also used MS Paint to make my own PC ZONE front cover. I think you should print it as a special edition of PC ZONE.

After reading this I think your "Trousers-off-o-meter" will be around "Knee Trembler" and then when you open the photos it will be "Right off".

Jordan



Our trousers have literally sailed across the room. Thanks Jordan.

# "DRM restrictions will be clearly detailed in the review, but will not factor into the review score"

I appreciate that magazine review copies of a game may not contain the DRM which will be imposed upon gamers. When that happens, the reviewer is having a different gaming experience to the paying customer and is more likely to give higher review scores than we feel the game deserves. Technically, you're reviewing a different product to the one buyers receive, presumably because you want your review to hit the newstand before your rivals. Not entirely unlike reviwing an unfinished game.

# Paul Hewitt

All of Ubisoft's PC review code has carried the same DRM as the retail versions, so rest assured that we've suffered through it like everybody else. And our stance will remain consistent: DRM restrictions will be clearly detailed in the review, but will not factor into the review score. This is down to a variety of reasons that we've given considerable thought to. The chance of DRM being deactivated in future is just a part of the argument against lowering review scores. We also have to consider that limitations of an online-only requirement will affect some users more than others.

This is what you did

with all that energy?

You can argue that it should affect the score, but we see DRM as a barrier to the game experience, rather than a part of it. We review the latter.



# **LET'S TWIST AGAIN**

I remember back in 2003 when I first played games like Knights of the Old Republic. The shock when I found out what really happened to Darth Revan. I was bewildered. Now in 2010 I have played my fair share of games but it seems like twists like this are dying.

Can't developers find out new ways to surprise players? In Fallout 3 if your character's dad was dead by the time you found him it might have added a good twist to the story. Can't we get games that give us a strong sense of belief in one thing, then abruptly at the most unpredictable moment tell us a different and very real truth?

Gone are the days when I couldn't predict the story of a game. These days it's good guy looks for bad guy fighting minions on the way. Good guy meets bad guy in a fight. Good guy wins. Simple. Can't we have the bad guy turns out to be good and good guy turns out to be bad or something like that? (Haze had the idea and blew it.)

Let the bad guy be someone least expected. Until then I only play storybased games to know how the protagonist gets from A to B to C, with the knowledge that they will get from A to C.

Surprise us devs. I want a good twist in modern games.

David 'Soap' Adejumo

Good twists would be a symptom of a larger want for better plots in general. The fact that BioShock is still the touchstone for twists in gaming storylines is depressing.

## **BILL POSTERS**

As I am sure you are aware, the government have recently passed the Digital Economy Bill, which will to come into effect a year from now. This bill has been rushed through without proper debate, many MPs see it as a quick and easy way to crack down on illegal downloaders



It may be quick and easy but its not fair, take a WiFi network for instance: it will be the responsibility of the owner, not the downloader, to make sure the content they download isn't illegal, and the owner is guilty until they prove it wasn't them.

# "Copyright holders will also have the right to shut down websites"

This will mean the shutdown of many open WiFi networks across the UK because the insurance and potential fines will be too much. Which for us means no more online gaming in hotels and public places.

Copyright holders and ISPs will also have the right to shut down websites that contain the slightest amount of illegal content or even a link to illegal content. The bill allows them to do this

> without warning, so many of our favourite websites may go under.

This bill was created as a result of lobbyists from record labels and game developers pressuring an outgoing government, I think it's high time they controlled piracy some other way, rather than just trying to trap us with legislation.

But there is hope! The ISP TalkTalk have said that they will not submit to the government's demands and have maintained

their pledges. Also, many people have protested against it, so maybe, just maybe, it will be revoked.

### Matt Hawes

By the time you read this, the government will have changed





### MASS EFFECT 2

Gareth Hughes PC ZONE SCORE 93%

Mass Effect suffered from a few flaws, most obviously the combat. Well the combat has been improved significantly. And by god you will use it. Story and loyalty missions are now little more than A-to-B run-and-gun exercises.

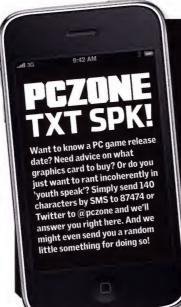
Elsewhere, the RPG elements have been dumbed down in ways too numerous to mention here and the side quests are scarce and pointless find and deliver missions.

The writing and characterisation are typically excellent and the game is well worth playing. Just don't go into it expecting too much more than a thinking man's Gears of War. The universe just got a little less epic.

## **YOUR SHOUT 83%**



Send your reviews with a maximum of 120 words, your name and a score to letters@pczone.co.uk. Every one printed here wins a top PC game.



Can you can whack a picture of a cat in the mag somewhere? Luke Westaway

Of course.

Is Lost Planet 2 coming to PC? Kevin Popular

Yep, it definitely definitely is. Preview

What is PC ZONE's favourite soft drink. Ian Birch

David's is Steven Seagal's energy drink, Steve's is also Steven Seagal's drink.

How can I get a job at Infinity Ward?

Just ask. They'll be desperate about now.



Text your PC game-related nonsense to 87474, putting PCZTXT at the beginning of the message, then leave a space, and continue with your text—and don't forget your name Texts should be no more than 160 characters long.

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and the future of the draconian Digital Economy Bill along with it, so we'll hold our tongues on this one.

# **JUST CLAUSE**

Can I ask, how it is possible that you gave Just Cause 2 84% in issue 219? I bought this game, you might say on your recommendation, on Friday. It installed fine, but when I tried to play it, no matter which graphics settings I used it finished the loading bit on start new campaign, and then just froze. I could hear the intro video but couldn't see it.

For information I have a quad core 2.8GHz processor with 6GB of RAM

and a 1GB graphics card, with over 1TB of free HDD space. When I ran the benchmarking even on lowest settings it ran for 30 seconds then froze. I could shut down using task manager so it isn't my computer, and I can run games like Mass Effect 2 on max settings without even a small amount of lag.

I have been looking at the Eidos and Steam forums for the last day or so and all the comments from other gamers seem to say "we will have to wait for a patch" but there are no official comments - which as this game has been out for about three weeks just indicates that they aren't interested.

# "We'll test games on your PC too, before handing out awards"

It's just the opinion of a lot of gamers, most of whom have similar gaming rigs to mine, but can't even play this game.

I mean come on what's going on here? Did Eidos even test this game on anything other than the hardware they used to build the thing?

### D.Jones

We tested Just Cause 2 on three different machines before reviewing it, and it worked splendidly each time. Next time, we'll be sure to test games on your PC too, before handing out any Recommended awards.

# STILL GOT IT

I decided I would put the decision to renew my subscription in your hands or to be more precise the hands of

> Alec Meer - because I decided that the decision to renew would be based on

your review of Command & Conquer 4. I love the C&C series and I wanted to see if you would go with a lot of other reviewers and praise the game or go with the people who actually buy it and say it was pants.

All I can say is I never should have had any doubts and my faith has been restored. I didn't even read the review -I just looked at the score and the comment "Nothing like C&C" and I knew that I'd be subscribing for yet another year.

Why they decided to change the game so radically on what was going to be the last ever in the series I'll never know. Personally I think they wanted to try something new but were unsure it would work, but knew if they stuck C&C on the box it would sell.

Thanks for restoring my faith in you, now I will just go click the renew button.

Stephen Purvis

# AROUND THE WORLD





By pure coincidence, both readers this month are wearing the same Space Invaders shirt. Hurrah! We want photos of you with PC ZONE in the most exotic or inappropriate locations. Every one printed wins a prize

# "Why can't the games companies accept that the consumer's experience is king?"

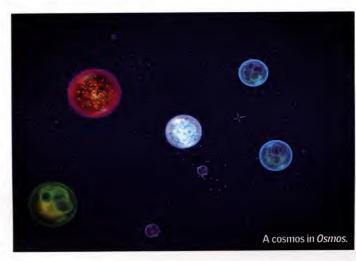
Amen. Like Gillian McKeith, we know a dodgy turd when we see one.

## **BT PHONE HOME**

I recently experienced a two day internet outage caused by a problem in the BT exchange. Currently I play a lot of World of Warcraft so I thought I'd take this opportunity to open one of the shrink wrapped games that have been languishing on my desk. I looked at the stack: Left 4 Dead 2, obviously online play only; Modern Warfare 2, internet connection required even for single player game; Batman: Arkham Asylum, Games for Windows - LIVE required even to play single player (and certainly to save the game).

OK, I thought, I'll finish off Osmos, which is a great little game I got from Steam. I expected to be able to run Steam in offline mode. However that was not the case. Despite both the Steam client and Osmos being fully up to date, Steam refused to start. This is the second time I've tried to use Steam during a genuine internet outage and it will not work for me, even if I disable the network interface. The offline mode works a treat when I'm connected to the internet.

So I was left unable to play my legitimately purchased games purely because the companies involved have created anti-piracy measures that affect me the consumer, and even more annoyingly do not affect the pirates because these techniques are all cracked usually on or before the game is available in the shops.



This madness has to stop. Why can't the games companies accept that the consumer's experience is king? This is a lesson that the music industry was forced to learn by Apple. Prior to the iTunes Store music piracy was rife and spreading to more and more consumers, partly fuelled by the easier experience offered by the likes of Kazaa.

Apple launched the iTunes store and reversed that trend. I'm not suggesting that music piracy stopped, however I think that honest consumers who had been tempted by piracy switched back to purchasing legally because now they could get their music fully integrated into the Apple eco-system, and feel better about themselves.

So back to my games. Do I want to become a pirate? No. It's important to me to support the games developers. Do I want to play the games I buy? Yes, but

I'll more than likely continue to follow the pirates to get my no-CD cracks, again for the convenience I gain, and yes I know the dangers of trojans and the like, and I take my own measures against those.

### Mark Young

Steam's offline mode is notoriously flaky, yet manages to escape the ire of most users until such time as their internet craps out and they're forced to attempt to use it.

Meanwhile anti-piracy measures that vilify legitimate users are a growing concern, but one that can be appreciated from both sides of the fence - take a look at our DRM feature on page 30 for Will Porter's insight into the heavy-handed lockdown of our games.

# PASSING FAD

Just been knocking about on The Passing for Left 4 Dead 2 and enjoying the Realism Versus mode. I love the way it forces you to work more as a team than ever before and really shows up

"I'll continue to follow the pirates to get my no-CD cracks, again for the convenience"



Dear Mystic Will, I found the following series of vowels, consonants and digits stamped on to the front of a game disc. Since spotting it, I've been stung by a bee. Can you tell me why my life has taken this drastic turn for the worse? D8BE-MCG35-JAND-UDR8-HJKS **Brian Cox** 

I hardly need to flex my psychic powers to divine this one, Brian! Just read it aloud! "Debbie McGee and Udder Hijinks". Have you recently encountered the magician's assistant? Perhaps on a dairy farm? Your problems can all be traced back to that fateful day, when you milked a cow with the mirthful McGee.

Have you got a mystic serial key you'd like Mystic Will to divine? Then send it in to letters@pczone.co.uk. Readings are quaranteed 100% accurate.

who's got a mic and who hasn't. Generally, the mic-less ones are getting chomped at the back or being ridden hard by jockeys.

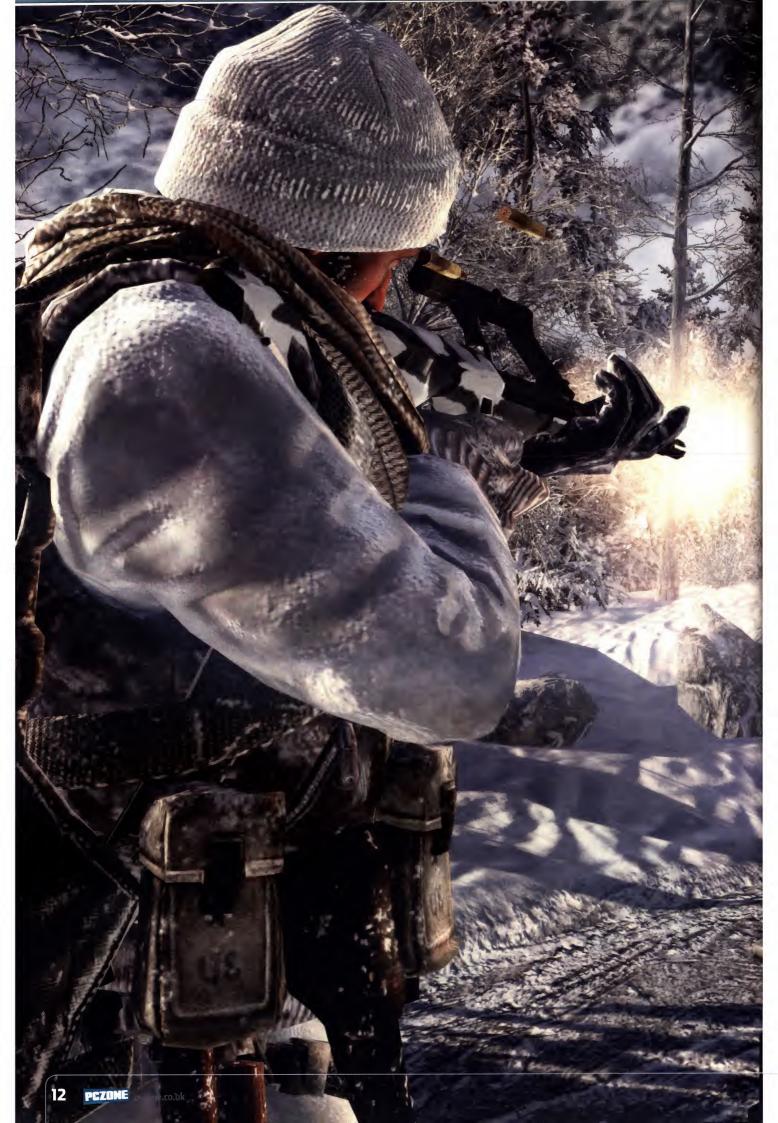
Anyway, why are Valve taking this away? Everyone loves it, so why not just leave it in forever? Do they really need this silly cycle of mutations they seem to be insisting on having?

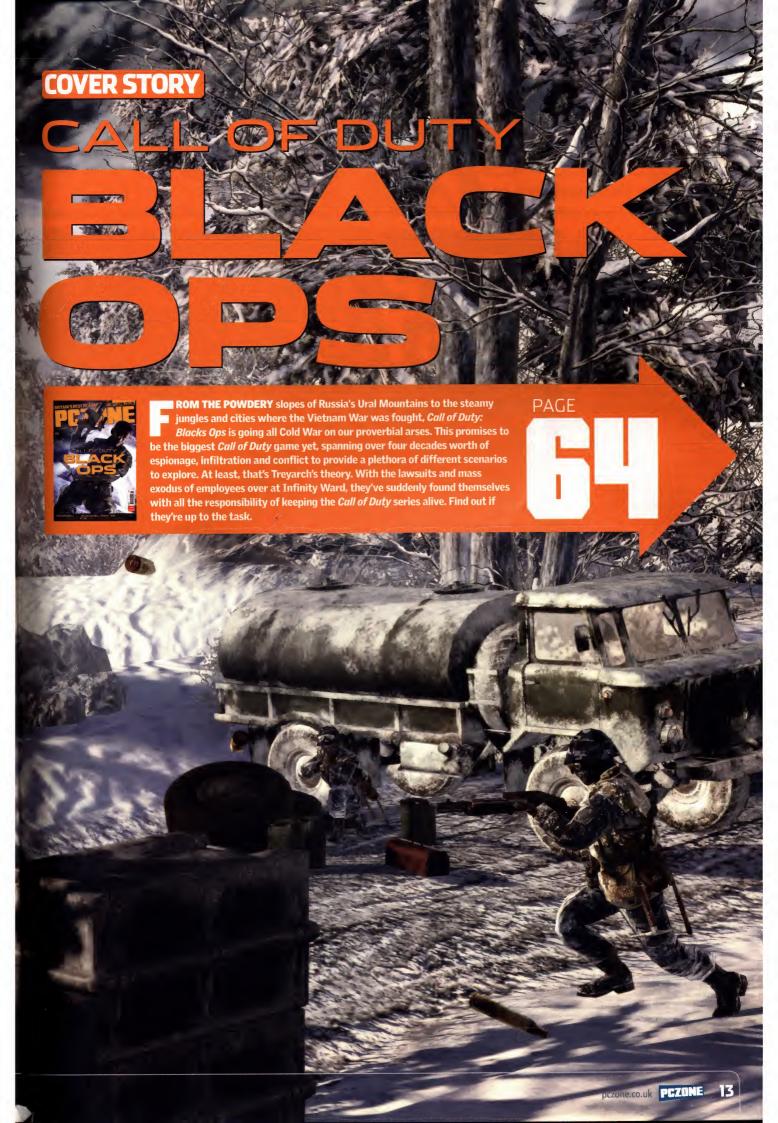
It's getting right on my tits knowing we'll be back to normal 'easy' Versus by the time anyone reads this.

### Jamie Pursglove

We suspect Valve will keep the most popular mutations once the cycle has been completed, so you shouldn't worry too much, Jamie.







Everything that matters in the world of PC gaming



DIGITAL LOVE

RM! THE SCOURGE of the high seas. The evil singularity around which all disease orbits. The leading cause of death among young adult males. Over 50? Talk to your GP about regular DRM checks. You may be at risk! Call now!

If our letterbox is any indicator of the concerns of our readers, there are two things getting right up your collective noses: your urgent need to amaze her with your god-like rod, and the dawn of the most intrusive DRM we've ever witnessed. Ubisoft's tirade of online-only releases spearheads a new generation of the legitimate consumer's vilification but what are these bastards up to?

As hard as it might be to conceive, they're not spending all this time and money on anti-piracy methods just to wind you up. The sum total of their business acumen has led them to these decisions. Decisions which, according to their graphs, will generate slightly more money than grief. From the inside looking out, it makes perfect shortterm sense in a market where, like it or not, most of us are stealing games.

That doesn't mean we have to like it: starting on page 30 we investigate the reasons behind the outrageous new restrictions imposed on gamers, how they're succeeding, how they're failing, and how some of the industry insiders reckon it's all going to pan out. If all that's a bit too serious for you, then read Log's interview with Joe 'Kane from C&C' Kucan on page 28, in which they discuss the use of the Kane voice during love-making, and Kane's new boy band.

# HASERS

Will XCOM be an con or will it be going straight? TE xcom.com ETA 2010

**OR A SERIES** as long-lived as X-Com, it's surprising how rubbish most of the games in it were. Only the first two - Enemy Unknown and Terror From The Deep could be deemed classics. After that, it's been all downhill with abominations like X-Com: Enforcer rubbing salt into fans' open wounds.

The decision by 2K to revive a franchise that hadn't seen a decent instalment since 1997's X-Com. Apocalypse was seen as something of a surprise, even more so when it was revealed it was being made by 2K Marin, the team behind BioShock 2. Then the real bombshell dropped.

XCOM will be an FPS where players take control of an FBI agent

whose job it is to identify the alien threat and eliminate it. Leaving aside the curious decision to make the player an FBI agent when the whole point of the series is that the agency involved with fighting the aliens is called 'X-Com', we know a few things about what the game will be like and what's going to be in it.

What it is, as described by 2K themselves, is a "re-imagining of the classic tale of humanity's struggle against an unknown enemy". It's very easy to be (extremely) cynical about these things, but positive thoughts could potentially arise from the potential wreckage.

First of all, 2K are making attractive noises about sticking with

certain themes from the original, such as researching the alien menace and building bases. Speculation about how this could work is all we have at the moment, but consider a game where you have the original Geoscape mode, mixed in with a stronger storyline and SWAT 4 style squad-based action when you venture into the mission zone. The thought of that, if done well, is enough to defuse any knee-jerk reaction to the genre change, and the potential quality of XCOM.

There are a lot of ifs and buts there, sure. One thing is for certain: XCOM is not going to be the X-Com that you knew, and perhaps still love to bits. It's going to be new. If it'll be excitingly new, we don't yet know.



# **ACTI-BUNGIE**

Bungie, of Halo fame, have signed a ten year publishing deal with Activision. This doesn't imply exclusivity - rather that they've got a game series coming.

# **INDUSTRIAL ACTION**

Activision's Thomas Tippl has said team" at Infinity Ward. As we go to press, over 25% of IW's staff have quit.

# **NEW ADVENTURES**

Sci-fi fans might like to know the first of the Doctor Who: The Adventure Games will be available for download on 5 June. This one is set in a Dalek-ruined '60s London.



What the future holds for piracy and copy protection does it really work?











# **BALLOT CAPER** Last call for long list votes

WEBSITE goldenjoysticks.com

WHILE GORDON BROWN/Nick Clegg/David Cameron/Nick Griffin (delete as appropriate) is celebrating with his cronies in Number 10, you've got an even more important decision to make: what game will you vote for in the 2010 Golden Joysticks Awards? And you've not got a huge amount of time to make a

decision either. The closing date for voting on the long list for nominations is 1 June, so you might even be too late by the time you read this. Let's hope not, as the PC boys could do with your support.

There's a lot of games over at goldenjoystick.com to choose from, so if you're a fan of Napoleon: Total War and you want to see it

annex the Game of the Year award, be sure to vote. Or perhaps you want to see Aion win Online Game of the Year, who knows. The answer is to get on that website and have a quick vote.

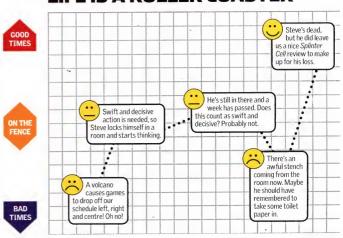
This is the 28th year of the Golden Joysticks and they're still the only videogame industry awards you have a say in, so don't throw away your chance to be a part

of the democratic process. Vote today (and vote PC).

# **STUFF**

Psst, over here, guv. I've got something to show you. Here, check it in this sack. It's a little ghost horse I found on this website, wow.com. Yeah, it's called a Celestial Steed. You can use it as a mount or something in the game World of Warcraft. Some mug on the internet said there were 140,000 chumps queuing for it online after only three hours. Can you believe it? Yeah, anyway, so it's just a horse and it's like a ghost too, so they're charging £17 for it. \$2million in the first four hours, they've made. Crook? Me?

# **LIFE IS A ROLLER COASTER**



IT REGINS AGAIN

SHIT! HOW LONG LEFT?

DEADLINE

# FIGHT THE POWER

Boycotts are deafening, investigates Pavel Barter, but is anyone listening?

N SEPTEMBER 2009 two Left 4 Dead fans, under the pseudonyms of Walking Target and Agent of Chaos, were taken on a guided tour of Valve's HQ and treated to an exclusive sneak peek of Left 4 Dead 2, by Valve's Gabe Newell.

The pair had been invited to the studio as special guests after they boycotted L4D's sequel over concerns that promised DLC for the game would be dropped.

"It changed my mind about the slapdash method we had thought was used to put the sequel together," confesses Walking Target. "What we were really interested in was the support the original L4D would continue to receive. With another DLC now confirmed, I feel Valve is living up to what they had told us."

The fact a publisher of Valve's

weight should pay

attention to an online boycott shows how much power protests can have. By refusing to sell Modern Warfare 2 on its Impulse service, Stardock sent a strong message to Activision for packaging the game with Valve's Steam client.

"This was something we could not accept," says Stardock boss Brad Wardell. "It is akin to being forced to

Direct2Drive and GamersGate, refused to stock Modern Warfare 2 it still became one of the biggest selling videogame titles of all time.

Ineffective boycotts have been around for years, only traditionally they were led by church groups, politicians, or Angry From Milton Keynes. In 1976 an arcade game called Death Race

# "Videogames have been boycotted by everyone from sex workers to Native Americans"

install a web toolbar in order to use something completely unrelated."

But although publishers may take notice when the masses get hissy, the effectiveness of online boycotts is questionable. After all, the L4D2 protest didn't stop it being released, and although other online retailers, like

caused mass furore, even though it looks like a bunch of albino ants playing hopscotch. Since then videogames have. been boycotted by everyone from sex workers (the killing of prostitutes in Grand Theft Auto) to Native Americans (over stereotypes in Activision's Western, Gun).

Recently it's been gamers who are more likely to launch boycotts. Most of the time, their organisers' motivations are daft: Square Enix didn't blink because fans were angry that Final Fantasy XIII was released on consoles and the PC. Likewise Diablo III devs at Blizzard haven't lost sleep because some think it isn't dark enough. And boycotts over charges for DLC - as was the case for Assassin's Creed II - are futile. After all if you don't want DLC, you don't have to buy it.

# **HATING HATERS**

Nevertheless, last year's L4D boycott, which rallied over 28,000 supporters, suggests carefully co-ordinated campaigns can be heard.

"It wasn't a protest against L4D2: it was a protest about the lack of support for the original L4D," says Walking Target. "Valve has a track record of supporting their games and standing by their community, I thought Valve might listen to their fans as they done in the past. I figured we might get a few thousand, but that was surpassed within a week. We were talking with Valve very early on, probably when we hit the 5,000 to 8,000 member mark."



A lot of political comment in there.





But can gamers change the ways of publishers? The Call of Duty fan community were fuming when Infinity Ward announced its abandonment of dedicated servers in Modern Warfare 2. It was as insulting as calling your granny a slut, they reckoned. Over 85,000 signed a petition, but the developers didn't dismantle IWNet or add dedicated server support to the PC game. Then, a few months later, most of the leading protestors could be found on Infinity Ward's own matchmaking service, playing the game.

Some protestors attempt a polite route. Christian Sørensen amassed 246,350 followers for his campaign to get LAN support into Blizzard's StarCraft II titled, "Please include LAN functionality in your future classic".

"We know this helped our petition," says Sørensen. "Keeping a sober tone is always the way forward. There's no reason to start a flame war with big

Is there anything you want PC **ZONE** to investigate? (Warning: some jobs might be considered too big or too small...)

@ letters@pczone.co.uk Special Report, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

companies who most likely won't listen to you anyway. So, we'd give this a try, and we know it worked."

Sørensen says he talked to Blizzard about the issue, but it doesn't seem to have done much good. Chris Sigaty, Starcraft II's lead designer, recently announced that LAN will definitely not be included. Instead, fans will get their online kicks from Battle.net.

# WHINE EFFECT

Due to the often whiny nature of boycotters they can be subjected to mass flaming. Walking Target, for example, received as much opposition as support: "There were a fair number of gamers that expressed negative views of the boycott," he says. "By and large, many people who could be described as vicious were not very well informed as to why we were protesting.

"We were also frequently covered by online publications who did not do their research and failed to read our reasons as to why we were protesting."

Sensing the aura of fail around boycotts, some protestors attempt different strategies. Lewie Procter, from gaming blog Savygamer.co.uk, recently tried to rally a protest against French publisher Ubisoft against their new PC DRM which requires a constant internet connection. He suggested gamers order Ubisoft games en mass, and then return them to retailers in their droves. Most respondents, however, considered this was too much effort. It could also backfire, should retailers refuse to give out refunds

More often than not, boycotts are as ineffective as a two-legged dog. But through strategy and willpower, they

# DOWN WITH THIS SORT OF THING

The e-petitions that went nowhere fast

# "DR UWE BOLL: MAKE MOVIES, NOT VIDEOGAME ADAPTATIONS"

petitiononline.com/bollnovg/petition.html An honourable sentiment as Dr Boll is behind such crimes against games and cinema as Postal, Far Cry and House of the Dead. Also a brave one, since he's offered to take on critics in a boxing ring. "We acknowledge that directing is Dr. Boll's hobby, passion, lifetime ambition and it would not seem proper to force

someone to abandon their interests," says the petitioner, pussy-footing out of harm's way. Signatures: 19





### "RENAME FALLOUT 3"

petitiononline.com/fo3ren/petition.html A long-winded rant about how Fallout 3 needs a different name because Fallout Tactics and Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel were not Fallout 3 and 4 in the series, and Fallout 3 has "radical changes that set it aside from the main Fallout series". Yawn. "There are further reasons, but we consider them subjective and not necessarily accepted by both old and new Fallout fans." Good grief. Signatures: 155

## "PLEASE ADD CROUCHING TO AVP"

petitiononline.com/AVPcrouc/petition.html

One last attempt to have the marines crouching in the new Aliens vs Predator. Sadly, Rebellion turned a blind eye and there is no crouching to be found in the finished game. Maybe they should have said "squat".

## "CLASS ACTION SUIT AGAINST ACTIVISION BLIZZARD FOR DANGEROUS AND DEFECTIVE WORLD OF WARCRAFT MICE"

petitiononline.com/mod\_perl/signed.cgi?wowmouse Paranoid fear mongering about Blizzard's World of Warcraft Mouse trying to electrocute the user and being "POTENTIALLY DANGEROUS". The petitioner also alleges that the mouse is cheaply built and "brakes" [sic] easily. Is he trying to ride it up the M1? "When this reaches 10,000 signatures," he writes, "we will engage an attorney to mount a class action suit against Activision Blizzard." Signatures: 66



# "JESUS CHRIST ON GRAND THEFT AUTO"

petitiononline.com/GTAJesus/petition.html

A polite request to feature Jesus in everyone's favourite free-roaming sin pit. "We believe that in order to crush all competition, and please the Grand Theft Auto audience, it would be a great idea to include a new character in the franchise - be it through downloadable content or in a possible GTA5. That character is Jesus Christ." Signatures: 12

can be heard. EA certainly paid attention when consumers launched a class-action lawsuit against them over the use of SecuROM in Spore in 2008. Likewise, Microsoft made Games for Windows - LIVE free after massive online boycotts.

However, boycotts by online retailers are able to change things, reckons Brad Wardell: "I think they have considerable influence on future titles. There's been a lot of demand for alternatives to Steamworks as well as pressure on

Valve to not force the installation of its client and store in order to play a game."

And although boycotts may be a lot of piss and vinegar, they have helped create dialogue: "Myself and other people who were at the heart of the boycott are currently working on ways to communicate better with publishers and developers," says Walking Target. "The long-term solution is not boycotts and protests, but new ways of communicating between players and the people making games."





4. GTA: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY Expansions and DLC are riding high in the chart. None higher than this



8. DAWN OF WAR II: **CHAOS RISING** Space Marines go all chaotic. With added genestealers.



6. THE SIMS 3: WORLD **ADVENTURES** This expansion adds actual gameplay to The Sims 3. Actually tolerable



12. DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS - AWAKENING A new campaign, new allies, new foes: it's the sequel that isn't a sequel.

# **HEAVY METAL**

# Free *MechWarrior* gets to go ahead

WEBSITE mektek.net

WHEN DEVELOPMENT TEAMS go quiet, it either means they're so busy working hard to finish their project they haven't got the time to talk with the outside world. Or they've got no money and are desperately hoping people just forget about them.

Fortunately, MekTek, the team behind the free MechWarrior 4 project, have fallen into the first category. You may remember they announced their intention to release Mech4 last year, but then nobody heard from them again.

Fearing the worst, especially when a short news item appeared on MekTek's website questioning whether they were going to be able to see the project through to the end, it was with gladdened hearts that we received the news that Microsoft's legal team had given MekTek the green light to

send their remade game out to the public.

With this good news, the continued excitement about the MechWarrior reboot planned by Piranha Games and the various mods thrown up by the amateur community, such as MechWarrior: Living Legends (issue 218) it seems to be a thrilling time to be a fan of things big, robotic and stompy

Microsoft have also shown that massive multinational corporations aren't always completely fixated on crushing the little guy under their



WAY BACK IN January 1993, back before even the mighty PC ZONE was born, GamesMaster came into existence. Since then it's been known for covering all the gaming bases and featuring, at least at first, Patrick Moore's ultra-politically reactionary cranium splattered all over the pages.

Times change and old men don't necessarily need to pick up the image rights cheques any

more. Now, in 2010, GamesMaster is growing to 116 pages and is being licked with new paint.

Rebooted right in the cojones, 'Nu' GamesMaster is going to give the readers more of a say with a doubled-insize readers' own section, which will include more contributions from the magazine's social network pages and fan art, debate, competitions and other

things like that all stuffed into the hamper. A big old guide to the best games around is also being included to help you take a broader look at what games are out there and which ones you might want to buy. More coverage will also be given to free-to-play and social media gaming.

The new design is going to go live in issue #226, which goes on sale on 21 May and

cost you 399 pence. If you're interested in things other than the PC (and why would you be, let's be honest) there are reviews of Super Mario Galaxy 2, Red Dead Redemption, Alan Wake and a game about slogging ripped males in the guts (UFC Undisputed 2010). There's also a big old exclusive look at "one of the biggest games in the world". Whatever could that be?



IF YOU'VE GOT 'it', you pretty much only lose it when you, well, lose it. As in, lose your mind or 'go a bit mad'. Sid Meier's far from being mad, though, unless you count his attempts to make us all adore him even more as being evil, despotic and just part of an inevitable attempt to seize global power by getting everyone addicted to Civilization V.

You might also scoff at his place on top of the PC gaming "Christmas Tree of Developmental Excellence", but he's just shown you how utterly wrong you are, were and will forever be. You see, Meier went back to his old university

a little while ago, ostensibly to help out some young would-be developers who were eager to follow in his footsteps.

There was a competition to make a game in 48 hours. Sid entered (though he also ruled himself out of being judged and, ergo, being able to win any prizes).

Naturally, Meier wiped the floor with everyone else, producing a game that stunned with its complexity, given the time period allowed to make the thing, and the fact it was in 3D. All the students had done was produce pitiful 2D efforts.



Sid Meier Director of Creative Development, Firaxis Games

So, long live Sid. If you want to see a video of him talking about the contest, and other contestants being struck by his brilliance, check out snipurl.com/meier48. You can also download the 10 winning games from the contest, but not Meier's miniature masterpiece. Damnit. (

"Naturally, Meier wiped the floor with everyone else"

# **GLOVES OFF DotEmu challenges Good Old Games**

**MONOPOLIES ARE NEVER** a good thing, so when a website, even one as nice and cuddly as Good Old Games (gog.com) corners the market, it's important that someone else comes

along before they get too big, lazy and forget how they got where they are.

Thankfully, DotEmu (dotemu.com) is attempting to thrust itself right into one of the cracks still left untouched by

GOG, coming out fighting with a beta version of its service that's currently offering a relatively understated and, well, malnourished line-up of games (at the time we go to print).

DotEmu has launched with a few interesting offers. First up is the Gobliiins Trilogy for a piffling £4.22. (Luckily, they haven't included the monstrous fourth game.) Next into the shopping basket is a 16-game Silmarils collection, a whole slew of games made by a French company that you've probably never heard of, because they went bust in 2003 and never really released any good games. Even their best ones, the *Ishar* games, weren't the best flick-screen RPGs around.

This is a great time to muscle in on the old games market and the DotEmu catalogue can only increase in breadth and scope. Wish them well and maybe there will be better games to buy in a few months than Draskula.





THE TOMB RAIDER THAT ISN'T

David Brown digs out Lara Croft and the Guardian of Light

**DEVELOPER** Crystal Dynamics **PUBLISHER** Square Enix **WEBSITE** crystald.com

RY TO IMAGINE the games industry without the presence of Lara Croft. Since 1996 she's been fuelling the fantasies of men (and women) all across the world, enraging environmentalists with her wanton slaughter of endangered species, and causing numerous heart attacks in archaeological circles with her persistent desecration of ancient tombs and artifacts. She's always been the star of the Tomb Raider games, but she's never been on the marquee. Until now.

This is, curiously, the first Lara Croft branded game and it's not the only thing that's unfamiliar. Gone is the familiar third-person view and instead there's a zoomed-out isometric perspective, like

"Guardian of Light is being pushed as a coop experience"

Diablo or Torchlight. If this fills you with shock, you needn't fret too much, as Guardian of Light isn't the direction the Tomb Raider franchise is heading in. This ties into the title change, being marketed as a splinter from the main tree, a download-only project that'll take eight hours or so to complete.

# LARA AND CO.

Guardian of Light is being pushed as a co-op experience, so this means Lara isn't alone. With her is a guy called Totec who's 2,000 years old and spoiling for a fight. He's there because another ancient bloke, an evil one this time, has also been unleashed on the world. Lara and Totec are teaming up and, as usual, they have complementary abilities that'll help them defeat the evil.

Lara has a grappling hook, while Totec has spears and a shield, which can be combined to help solve the numerous puzzles. Totec might throw a spear into a wall for Lara to jump onto then she

might use the grappling hook to access... a distant ledge, flip a switch to lower a bridge, thereby allowing Totec to continue. Interestingly, if played in single player, you only control one of the characters, but the levels change to take account of this.

Even with the perspective change and the introduction of online and offline co-op, Guardian of Light has still got a strong connection to the principles of the main Tomb Raider series. Lara's the main character, clearly, voiced again by Keeley Hawes, but there are others.

The action is still focused in and around ancient tombs and temples, with plenty of platforms to leap on and that current industry buzzword 'verticality' coming into play. Combat, though, will be different.

Focusing more on large numbers of enemies, Lara can wield an M16 while Totec rinses foes with magic. If one of you dies, the other one has to hold out

until you respawn, so you might consider using deployable bombs and other items to help you survive in the absence of your partner.



Guardian of Light isn't going to replace the Tomb Raider series, you can be sure of that. What it is going to do is provide a different context to Lara's world wanderings, while giving us co-op fiends what we crave so much.

The game is going to have puzzles galore and lots of shooting and violence, plus the idea of a game that changes itself depending on whether you are alone or are playing with a friend is very intriguing indeed.

So while there might not be many tigers or leopards to gun down, and you might not be able to gaze longingly at Lara's tight buns like you usually can, maybe you'll begin to admire her more for her abilities than her assets.





















1978 Space Invaders

1980

1983

1983 Manic Miner

1983









Sonic the Hedgehog





Resident Evil







# LICOMING How you'll be wasting your money in 2010

**OW THAT WE'RE** moving into the summer months, some publishers are fixing down when they'll actually get their games finished and out the door. Most of

The Secret World, the really promising conspiracy/action/horror MMO: TBA. Diablo III, the most eagerly awaited click-a-

thon: TBA. *Batman: Arkham Asylum 2*, a sequel we'd maim clowns to play: TBA.

The only piece of good news is that *StarCraft II* will be here soon. But Mr Scuttlebutt says the instalments will cost £50 each. That's £150 for the lot, which, considering inflation, 100 years ago would've been about £13,000. Frankly ridiculous.

# **ALPHA PROTOCOL**

This espionage RPG is promising to be everything for every gamer. Do you want to be a Bourne, breaking heads and arms as you spy your way around the world? Well, you can: just specialise in martial arts. Do you

in martial arts. Do you prefer to do a Bond, alternatively charming and shooting your way through the bad guys? Check – ramp up your charisma and pistol skills. And how about if you really fancy being Ghandi? Well, you can.

According to a Twitter message, a developer on Alpha Protocol managed to complete the entire game without killing anyone. That the game's missions are designed to be so open you can clear the game with bloodless hands, could make this one of the most innovative RPGs we've seen.

the games we really want are still being TBAed.



# DC UNIVERSE ONLINE

After the near-perfection that was Arkham Asylum this MMO better be bloody spectacular if it's going to have any impact.

Sony Online Entertainment had also better learn from the mistakes Cryptic made with their two

licensed MMOs – Star Trek
Online and Champions
Online – and not release a
buggy game that's filled
with dull missions, once
disappointed fanboys and
girls complete the tutorials.

We don't know much about *DC Universe Online*, except that it's going to focus on action and fighting, and has been designed to be playable on consoles and

the PC. This makes us suspect "Dumb it down" was part of SOE Austin's design brief. But if they give us a chance to watch that pretentious moralising git Superman get his arse kicked by Bizarro, we'll forgive them.



GAME	<b>PUBLISHER</b>	ETA
SPLIT/SECOND: VELOCITY	DISNEY	21MAY
ACHTUNG PANZER: KHARKOV 1943	PARADOX	28 MAY
ALPHA PROTOCOL	SEGA	28 MAY
BLUR	ACTIVISION	28 MAY
PRINCE OF PERSIA: FORGOTTEN SANDS	UBISOFT	1 JUNE
DARKSTAR ONE: BROKEN ALLIANCE	KALYPSO	4 JUNE
STARCRAFT II: WINGS OF LIBERTY	ACTIVISION	25 JUNE
SINGULARITY	ACTIVISION	29 JUNE
PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN ARMADA OF THE DAMNED	d: DISNEY	30 JUNE
<b>LEGO HARRY POTTER:</b> YEARS 1-4	WARNER BROS	JUNE 2010
BATTLEFIELD 1943: PACIFIC	EA	JUNE 2010
TOY STORY 3: THE VIDEOGAM	IE DISNEY	30 JULY
MAFIA II	2K GAMES	27 AUGUST
CIVILIZATION V	2K GAMES	1SEPT
DEAD RISING 2	CAPCOM	3 SEPT
TWO WORLDS: THE TEMPTATION	ZUXXEZ	17 SEPT
DC UNIVERSE ONLINE	SONY ONLINE EN	T. 24 SEPT
F1 2010	CODEMASTERS	SEPT

**UBISOFT** 

EA

**SEPT** 

12 OCT



R.U.S.E.

**MEDAL OF HONOR** 

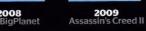
TALL OUT NEW VECAS	DETHECDA	20.0CT
FALLOUT: NEW VEGAS	BETHESDA	29 OCT
TRON: EVOLUTION	DISNEY	1NOV
RAGE	BETHESDA	12 NOV
APB	EA	SUMMER 2010
MONKEY ISLAND 2: LECHUCK'S REVENGE SE	LUCASARTS	SUMMER 2010
ARCANIA: GOTHIC 4	JOWOOD	AUTUMN 2010
F.E.A.R. 3	WARNER	<b>AUTUMN 2010</b>
BRINK	BETHESDA	WINTER 2010
CRYSIS 2	EA	WINTER 2010
GHOST RECON: FUTURE SOLDIER	UBISOFT	WINTER 2010
MAX PAYNE 3	ROCKSTAR	WINTER 2010
<b>NEED FOR SPEED:</b> WORLD	EA	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: HEART OF THE SWARM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
STARCRAFT II: LEGACY OF THE VOICE	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
TEST DRIVE UNLIMITED 2	NAMCO BANDA	WINTER 2010
WORLD OF WARCRAFT: CATACLYSM	ACTIVISION	WINTER 2010
THE AGENCY	SOE	TBA 2010
<b>ALIENS:</b> COLONIAL MARINES	SEGA	TBA 2010
ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM2	SEGA WARNER BROS	TBA 2010 TBA 2010
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BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM 2 CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION	WARNER BROS BOHEMIA TECHLAND	TBA 2010 TBA 2010
BATMAN: ARKHAMASYLUM2 CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION DEAD ISLAND	WARNER BROS BOHEMIA TECHLAND	TBA 2010 TBA 2010
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BATMAN: ARKHAMASYLUM2 CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION  DEAD ISLAND DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE MAGICKA SPEC OPS: THE LINE THIEF 4 DEAD SPACE 2 THE SECRET WORLD THE WITCHER 2 STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC	WARNER BROS BOHEMIA  TECHLAND EIDOS VALVE PARADOX 2K GAMES EIDOS EA FUNCOM NAMCO-BANDA LUCASARTS	TBA 2010 EARLY 2011 EARLY 2011 SPRING 2011 AUTUMN 2011
BATMAN: ARKHAMASYLUM2 CARRIER COMMAND: GAEA MISSION  DEAD ISLAND DEUS EX: HUMAN REVOLUTION HALF-LIFE 2: EPISODE THREE MAGICKA SPEC OPS: THE LINE THIEF 4 DEAD SPACE 2 THE SECRET WORLD THE WITCHER 2 STAR WARS: THE OLD REPUBLIC BEYOND GOOD & EVIL 2	WARNER BROS BOHEMIA  TECHLAND EIDOS VALVE PARADOX 2K GAMES EIDOS EA FUNCOM NAMCO-BANDA LUCASARTS  UBISOFT	TBA 2010 EARLY 2011 EARLY 2011 AUTUMN 2011 TBA 2011













2010 Final Fantasy XIII



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adventurers. Levels 50-55 will deal with

learning more about the oncoming threat before you delve deeper into

As you read this, Frogster will have

begun rolling out the first wave of

material for Chapter 3, beginning with

Patch 3.0.0. This added more than 100 new quests, difficulty levels for certain

danger in order to get to 60.

TAKE THREE

With well over three million users reportedly being signed up after the second expansion and a significant number having joined up since then, it seems their philosophy is popular with players, who want to MMO without the hassle of subscribing.

If you want to see what Runes of Magic is about, runesofmagic.com is where you'll be wanting to head off to. PEZ



# Your chance to win a spanking new PC courtesy of Frogster

F YOU'RE READING this page, droplets of saliva oozing from your gaping maw, then chances are your PC is a clunky old heap of scrap metal filled with ancient components seared by the heat of overclocking. On the other hand you might just be a greedy swine who wants another PC so you can play some multiplayer games by yourself.

Whatever your situation is, you've got the chance to win a whole PC worth over £1,000 all thanks to our extraordinarily generous, wonderful and philanthropic friends at Frogster.

With it you'll be able to impress your friends with a cacophony of amazing sound effects, the splendour of glorious PC visuals and the dextrous way you wield your mouse in online games, all

without having to worry about the whole thing exploding because of the strain.

You'll even be able to play Runes of Magic, Frogster's very own free-to-play MMO, which we tell you all about on your left.

Instead of moaning about not being to run things on 'high', just answer the transparently easy question below and you could be saving yourself more than 100,000 pennies.



- A. RISE OF THE DEMON LORD **B.** ASCENT OF THE
- WIZARD-PRINCE
- C. TOMMY COOPER'S RAGTAG **ELF BASH**

# SO WHAT'S INSIDE THE BOX?

Cooler Master Storm Scout Case; Cooler Master 500 Watt PSU; ASUS P6T X58 motherboard; 2.8GHz Intel Core i7 930; 6GB Corsair DDR3 RAM; Maxtor 250GB 7,200rpm; LG 22x SATA DVD-RE; XFX GTX 260 896MB graphics card; Windows 7 Home Premium (64-bit); two years return-to-base parts and labour warranty (hardware only),

# **HOW TO ENTER**

## **TEXT YOUR ANSWER TO 87474**

Start your message PCZRUNE, then space, then enter A, B or C, then a space, then your name and email address

# TO ENTER ONLINE HEAD TO

futurecomps.co.uk/pczrune and follow the prompts.

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# **UPFRONTCOLUMN**

JON 'LOG' BLYTH....

If you want to enter into a debate with this professional opinion stater, you can contact Log by the methods below.

@ letters@pczone.co.uk

Mr Log, PC ZONE, 2 Balcombe St, London, NW1 6NW

# MODERN WOWFACE



have just clocked my 112th hour playing *Final Fantasy* XIII, and I'm empty. All those creative indie games etched into the ferrous grey surface of my mind (or however it is minds and/or Etch-a-

Sketches work) have been shaken clean. I no longer care about piracy and DRM because I've been running around FF13's one open location, Gran Pulse, working out which marginally more powerful enemy my marginally stronger characters might now be able to take down.

You don't need to have played it to understand. I've just described every grind in the world. But here's the kick in the dick: you only unlock the last stage of character development when you kill the final boss, and finish the game. After that, you're free to return to Gran Pulse, kill all the stuff that was beyond you, earning slightly crazier shit to wear, all inevitably leading back to that final boss, who you'll now be able to kill in a way that's no longer challenging or fun. Sweet deal, eh?

A virtual sense of choreographed progress is what makes pretend stuff great. And I'm not just talking video games: board games, movies, books, everything aside from the squalid and fantasy-free mulch of real life, and the misguided shit that tries to reproduce it. Woodcutter Simulator – aside from being a shit game, you represent an aching flaw in humanity.

## THE NUMBED MIND

Fiction can be a convenient shortcut to the sort of emotions that take a lot more effort when you're dealing with real people, who keep telling you to get off or they'll call the police. In this game, I got my laptop and started making a spreadsheet of items. I once had a job in which I extracted information from a database, put it into a spreadsheet, and presented it to executives as a report. Tedious, but they paid me to do that because it was my job. Of all the thundering emotions that games like *Plain Sight* and *Just* Cause 2 can synthetically feed to me, why have I settled on 112 hours of duty and research? What's wrong with me?

It was a lonely process, too. Not like World of Warcraft, in which you at least get to meet someone who'll check out your gear and call you a noob. Here, my only friends were the translucent-skinned writers of megabytelong plain text FAQs, and forums in which far too many disturbingly obscure fact are assumed to be common knowledge.

With WOW, I got to talk with my friends in the language we'd learned together. It wasn't particularly acceptable, but surround yourself with enough people with the same problem as yourself, and you don't have to acknowledge the problem. I'm surprised AA meetings don't descend into awesome vodka parties more often, really. But the FF community seems

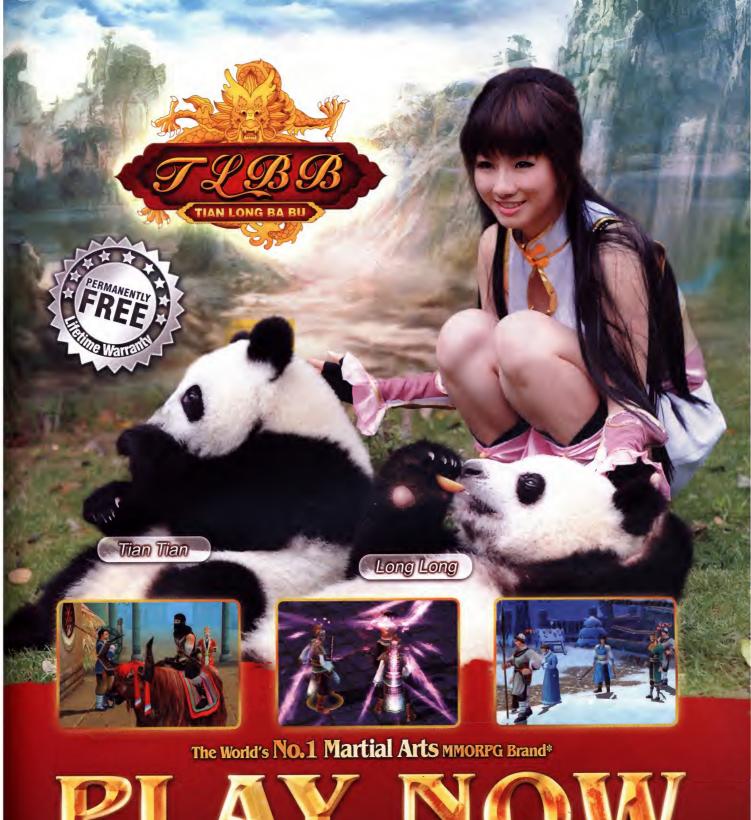


# "Every game should film your face, and relay that image on the screen"

weird and unfriendly – a collection of clueless idiots, angry specialists playing the import, and pube-sprouting shouters who belittle anyone having problems with a boss that only took them three minutes.

Basically, I developed what I call Wowface. Around the time of *The* Burning Crusade, when I worked full time in the Zone offices, I tried to get away with playing WOW during work hours. It didn't work. Not because anyone tried to stop me, but because I was informed that it was obvious what I was playing, from the rhythmic, repetitive tapping of my number keys, and the drawn slackness in my facial muscles. This state of mind, where you can't hear words, but only respond to tones of voice with semiappropriate noises, is exactly where I've been. There's only one solution: every game should be forced by law to film your face, and relay that image on the screen. How is up to the developer. It could be an inset box, onto the T-shirt of the protagonist, or converted into a texture and tiled across every wall in the game. But it has to be there, constantly. It's only fair the screen's filled with hypnotic shit: graphics, missions, story, progress bars, collectibles. All it would've taken for that spell to be broken would be to see the pallid unperson I'd become gawping back at me.

I'm going to put this compulsive form of living death behind me, and play something a little less dehumanising. Maybe I'll try out Sleep Is Death. That forces you to be creative and sociable. I give myself four weeks before I have a new epiphany that all people are shit.



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# **JOE KUCAN** ACTOR, GAME DEVELOPER AND IMMORTAL MEGALOMANIAC

# UCAN PLAY THAT GAME

One day Jon 'Log' Blyth gave a mean dictator a piggy back...

EA PR: Do you mind if Joe eats a muffin while he talks?

Log: Not at all. He can pour milk all over his chest if he likes.

Joe: That's alright. I'm done with this muffin. This muffin is over.

Log: So, it's good to meet you. This is honestly a real pleasure. In fact, I got the feeling, when we shook hands, that it was an inadequate gesture. I wanted to hug you. I bet you get a lot of that. Joe: Did you play the first one? How old

were you? Log: Early 20s. Too old to legitimately be as excited as I am, if I'm being honest. But it's not just me. My former editor, Will Porter, fondly recalls demanding a hug from you in Vegas. Joe: Will Porter? I think I remember that name. Sweaty, clammy little guy? Log: That's how we referred to him in

the office. Joe: Yes, I do remember him. [Speaks into the recorder] I really liked our hug, Will. It changed me fundamentally. It made me a better person, and frankly a little nervous about my sexuality. Thank you, Will, you sweaty little bastard.

EA PR: Sorry Will.

Log: He'll love that. So, are you sick of being asked "what next" yet? Joe: No, it's the very first time. Well, I'm going to answer it like it was the first time.

**Log:** It's a pretty insulting question. After all you're not a one-trick pony. Joe: Well, they know me as a one-trick pony, so it's understandable. I've had some fun in theatre, features, TV, and stage, and I've had some fun as a teacher, and in videogames. Just lately I've sort of philosophically been reminding myself that my whole life is just about enjoying the moments. If someone asked me what was the highlight of my time in Command &







Conquer, and I can honestly say right now. I didn't have to pay to come here! They actually paid for my a ticket! **EA PR:** I just paid for Jon to go to North

Joe: Isn't that cool?

Log: I'm constantly amazed. I went to New York! I mean, it was a four hour stop-over in JFK, but still – New York!

Log: So it's fair to say you won't be sitting in a room watching old cutscenes from the first C&C then. You do seem like an impossibly upbeat man. Are you sure there isn't a tortured soul somewhere in there?

"I took two bottles into the

shower, now look at me.'

Joe: Oh no, my life is all sugar and spice. I drive a solid gold motorcycle. I eat nothing but caviar, I drink nothing but

Log: For a moment, I thought you were going to say you did Kane lines at him while he was taking a piss.

Joe: Sadly no, he recognised me. That's how I spend my time. I spend my time in airports with a pen, just looking for people. "I'll sign? Oh! Oh, no? OK."

Log: Did you have much input into the final script? You don't seem like the kind of guy who'd not want to put his stamp on something, either T-shirts in airports or acting roles.

Joe: Both of my parents are English teachers, so the structure and rhythms of language is very important to me. They were generous enough to let me make some judicious cuts, to make it more Kane-ish. Kanerific. Kanelicious. Kanelicious I think is best. Which my new live group. I've got a new boy band. I'm doing auditions, sending out the call for 13 year-old boys.

Log: Which brings me to my last question: have you ever used the Kane voice during the love act?

Joe: I'm not sure what you mean when you use the phrase "the love act".

Log: It's what you do between mortgages and families.

Joe: No, I couldn't do that to a young woman. As it is I have to keep a defibrillator by my bed, just in case I completely overwhelm them with my physical beauty. The Kane voice would be too much.

For full interview visit pczone.co.uk

# "I have a fur-lined sink. My toilet wipes my own ass. It's all automatic - my life is brilliant"

Joe: Other than that, I've had a couple of movie offers. I don't know whether it'll happen, but you know, it's always fun to think about what may be. Hev. how do I get on Torchwood? I would love to be in Torchwood.

Log: You have to snog John Barrowman.

Joe: I'll French kiss a guy. I watch all of those horrible, terrible science-fiction movies. And I want to be in every single one of them.



champagne. I have a fur-lined sink, I mean my toilet wipes my own ass. It's all automatic - my life is brilliant. Log: They have those in Japan, don't they?

Joe: That's not really a joke is it, they exist. Well my toilet makes me a sandwich, how's that?

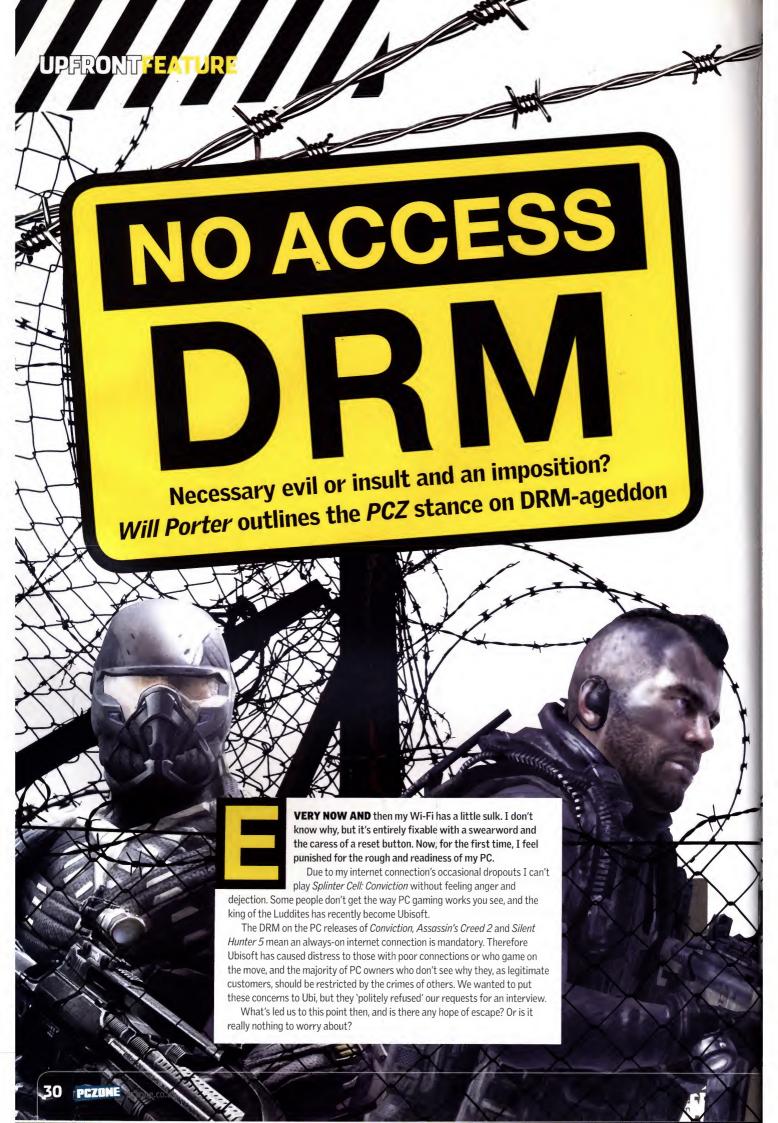
Log: And shoves it right up.

Joe: Puts it in your colon for you! EA PR: I'm glad I've eaten.

Log: So, what's a fun time that you've been spotted by a fan?

Joe: I was in a Canadian airport, and I realise I'm looking at my face on the back of this guy's T-shirt. I thought we were probably working for the same people, or something. But he went off towards a different plane. I met him later on in the toilets, I signed his shirt and everything.





# PIRATE SCUM



**WE CAN'T PRETEND** 

that piracy isn't an issue for PC gaming. According to 2009's estimated total

download charts from TorrentFreak (torrentfreak.com), the PC version of Modern Warfare 2 was downloaded 4.1 million times, but a comparison to an estimate of 270,000 US sales in the

same period provides some stark relief. Meanwhile TorrentFreak reckons that pirate versions of the Xbox 360 version were obtained 970,000 times, as compared to six million sales in shops over same period.

# **PIRATE PROBS**

Sure, you can argue about figures being affected by the consolification of the game and the targeting of the marketing, but for publishers who talk in raw cash, the pattern is still writ large: a need to favour the console in cross-platform releases, and to lock PC games tight against the forces of piracy. It's debatable, but also understandable.

Of course, you can't assume that an illegally downloaded game is the same as a stolen purchase - there's no evidence that people would have bought a game in any case. The hugely pirated Crysis is thought to have been downloaded on a whim by a large proportion of people who wanted to try it as a benchmark rather than a game.

Then again, there can only be a negative effect on retail sales - with added factors such bugged versions distributed by pirates spreading negative vibes around the internet. Sometimes, as with the original Assassin's Creed. this occurs before the game is released. Ubisoft claim 'irreparable damage' was done by a pre-release copy of that game, which included a purposefully placed show-stopping bug, being released on the internet.



"You can't assume that an illegally downloaded game means a stolen purchase"

COUNTDOWN TO DRM DOOM



Codewheels and checking words in manuals ruled the roost. Also: grass was greener and the sun shinier



game activation. And the advent of SecuROM.

**50**%

estimated percentage of a game's illegal downloads occuring within the first week of its release

# CRACKS N' HACKS

Demigod took its servers down, as 18,000 legitimate buyers logged in

THE QUESTION PUBLISHERS face isn't "Will our game be cracked?" but whether it'll happen in days or weeks. Or even if the game will be leaked and appear online before the official release, as happened with Far Cry 2, Spore, Assassin's Creed

and Fallout 3.

Estimates place over 50% of a game's illegal downloads as happening during its release week, when anticipation is highest and the publisher's marketing budget is being splashed around. So DRM has often become a holding measure against pirate groups such as Razor 1911 and Skid Row (both of whom refused to answer requests for interviews) whose cracks are as inevitable as sunrise.

# **HOLDING ACTION**

BioShock may have caused controversy with its online activation, limited installs, poor messaging to consumers, and SecuROM DRM that stays in your PC after the game is removed, but it still took 13 days for it to be hacked – a minor triumph. Of course the adverse publicity harmed 2K Games' reputation with gamers, showing that moderation is required in these matters.

The other day one hazard is for servers (and customer services) to be bombarded with the needs of those who've installed pirated versions of games.

Notably, Gas Powered
Games approach to copy protection with

FAR CRY 2, SPORE, ASSASSIN'S CREED AND FALLOUT 3

AND FALLOUT 3
all appeared online before their official release

alongside over 100,000 pirates.
Up until now, DRM has been about stemming the inevitable tide, rather than assuming that a game will be safe from being cracked forever.

BioShock's online activation was more Big Brother than Big Daddy.

BioShock's online activation was more Big Brother than Big Daddy.

"BioShock caused controversy with its online activation, limited installs, and SecuROM"





**UBISOFT AREN'T THE** only ones who have suffered from an attack on their servers through DRM backlash. Sports Interactive's Miles Jacobson speaks candidly on the issue of those who push through the Football Manager turnstiles without paying.

# To what extent are FM games pirated? How do you assess how many of these

I can currently only look at figures for one particular year, where we had hooks in the copy protection system we used to show who was playing legit or pirated copies. Seventy per cent of people playing the game were playing pirated copies. This hook was removed, but late in the day,

There is no way to know how many of these are lost sales. My estimate is 20%-30% of these would purchase the game if there was no other way for them to get it, but we can never be sure of that. And, to be frank, that's not really the point as far as our anti-piracy measures are concerned. We already provide a lengthy demo for people to play to decide whether Football Manager is value for money or not, so don't believe those pirating the game have any reason to in the first place!

## Is the copy protection attached to new FM releases regarded as a piracy solution, or is it a stopgap measure to prevent damage to week one sales?

We have only used DRM once, and that was with FM2009. We have used other copy protection systems before and since, but not DRM. The idea of it is to be a piracy solution. It's just no one has found something yet that works in that way! People and companies will continue to try, just like people have tried to create solutions to stop people breaking into cars and houses. At some point, someone may succeed, but at the moment, anti-piracy measures work only as deterrents to some.

### What problems did Sports Interactive come up against in with the DRM in FM2009?

The only time we have used DRM, the system we used was hit by a massive denial of service attack on the day the game was released. This stopped legitimate customers from being able to authenticate their games. It was the worst 48 hours of my career to date, and it was dealt with as

I still don't understand, and never will, why there are people out there so determined to ruin other people's enjoyment of the internet by doing DoS attacks - it's an alien concept to me.

# What do you make of the current fashion of publishers demanding a permanent online connection? Is the outcry from the PC community justified?

Personally speaking I'm not a fan, as it would stop me being able to play PC games on my laptop whilst travelling, which is when I'm most likely to be playing games.

### Would a similar online-only scheme ever work for Football Manager?

It works for Football Manager Live, because that's an online game. I'm not looking at solutions that involve this kind of system, although online-only authentication is something that is brought up regularly, and would be considered if we can get around any possibility of DoS attacks.

# THE UBISOFT DIKTAT

7 hrs

the duration a denial of service attack brought down some of Ubisoft's authentication servers THE DECISION TO lock Ubisoft games tightly to an internet connection has not come out of the blue – as a company they've experimented with copy protection more than most. For example, 2008's *Prince of Persia* came free of DRM – a move widely seen as the company testing the water for their future policies. Whatever they discovered clearly made them decide to move over to the other extreme: the tyranny of Uplay.

With save games stored externally and a constant online connection required to allow code that was missing from the game players received buying it, to be downloaded, rather than a simple online activation, Uplay has been successful at keeping the pirates at bay. But in terms of keeping them out wholesale it has failed.

# **HACKED OFF**

Early hack attempts provided playable, yet incomplete, versions of *Silent Hunter 5*, and now *Assassin's Creed 2* has been hacked and can be played to completion. The process to actually get it going, however, is a real faff. The Uplay system is certainly still putting off casual pirates. Ubisoft claim that their system will "evolve and improve", making this round one of a series of bouts against the pirates.

Yet the public relations storm that has surrounded the issue is something

of a disaster. Denial of service (DoS) attacks brought down some of Ubi's authentication servers for seven hours, and Ubisoft's name has certainly

Pirates operate in moody lighting.

been muddied.

Prince of Persia was DRM-free, and a telling experiment...





2007

Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory has Star-Force. Anti Star-Force campaign leads to a dropped lawsuit against Ubisoft. "2008's Prince of Persia came free of DRM"

# THE OTHER OPTIONS

NICHOLAS LOVELL, FOUNDER of Gamesbrief (gamesbrief. com), is an expert in the business of gaming. We got in touch to find out how increasingly stringent DRM demands are affecting the moneymen of gaming, and just how piracy is changing the PC gaming we're used to.

# What do you make of the current anti-piracy precautions that we're seeing on the PC?

Defeating piracy is a fine balance. Publishers need to protect their investment in intellectual property without alienating their paying consumers. Disc-based DRM has had its problems and is always cracked, but its existence is, at best, a deterrent and, at worst, a clear reminder to pirates that they are stealing. Always-on requirements have tipped that balance against legitimate customers. There is now no doubt in my mind that pirates now have a better experience than legitimate consumers.

# Are current publisher measures too draconian, or are PC gamers being too sensitive?

Not only are they too draconian, they are bizarre. Steam has shown how you can have a balance between regular authentication checks and the ability to play the game without a permanent internet connection. It seems crazy to me that Ubisoft didn't emulate Steam, which by some estimates has more than half the market, and instead went for their own, draconian system.

My belief is that Ubisoft are targeting the wrong metric. They are trying to reduce piracy. I think that they'll succeed, but I also think that they'll reduce their sales. That's surely not the objective.

# In Ubisoft's position, and indeed EA's, what else could they have done other than enforce an always-on internet connection on consumers to fight piracy?

Tim O'Reilly once said that the greatest issue facing any author is obscurity, not piracy. The same is true for games. Publishers spend a ton of money on promoting its games. For *Modern Warfare 2*, the marketing and distribution budget was four times the size of its development budget. So there are ways to see piracy as the start of a relationship with a future customer, not theft.

Project Ten Dollar, EA's way of rewarding people who buy the original game at retail [this is EA's marketing drive to include free DRM with store-bought games], is a good example of how to generate revenue from secondhand (and pirated) material. I think it's a great use of a new business model to reward legitimate, paying, supportive customers, and not punish them.

How else could they do it? Give the whole game away entirely for free, make it small, and charge for DLC. Investigate a virtual goods model (by most estimates, Zynga [creator of *Mafia Wars* and *Farmville*] is now more valuable than Ubisoft.) Slash the marketing budget and rely on pirated copies to spread the word about how good your game is, then charge for additional elements. In short, experiment to see how you can add value to your users, not to see what you can take it away.

# In what other directions is PC gaming evolving as a reaction to the rampant piracy that plagues it?

PC gaming is in rude health, yet selling boxed products at retail is in terminal decline. We are seeing games that charge subscriptions, and games that are monetised entirely through virtual goods. Always-on

DRM is not wrong per se. It's just a huge

mistake to charge gamers

a huge premium for



their content and to limit their ability to play it in a way that pirates are not limited.

### Is the change in PC gaming a good thing?

Unequivocally, yes. Publishers are obsolete. Their business model evolved when it was incredibly expensive to distribute a game. Publishers became the gatekeepers determining what got made and their focus was on reducing

risk. But now we don't need gatekeepers because distribution is so close to free as to make no odds. Sure, we need the skills of a publisher: marketing, finance, etc, but we don't need their risk management any more. We're in the very early days, but in the long term, the changing business model will be fabulous for PC gaming.

It's my belief that Ubisoft is hastening this process, by making legitimate, boxed, PC games sufficiently unattractive to consumers to drive them away to other

forms of PC gaming entertainment.
Sometimes, even as an analyst and a former investment banker, the foolishness of big companies makes my jaw drop.



BioShock is released. DRM only allows the game to be installed twice. The install limit was removed in 2009.



# THE WAY AHEAD, AND PC ZONE'S POSITION

PC GAMING HAS always been about autonomy, the creation of your own network of favoured programs and hardware. And the imposition of a company to demand strict adherence from customers who

steps too far.
What's more, permanently online connections may be the norm in the USA, Canada and South Korea, not globally. Just as we baulked at *Steam*,

we coughed up bile at Ubisoft's Uplay.

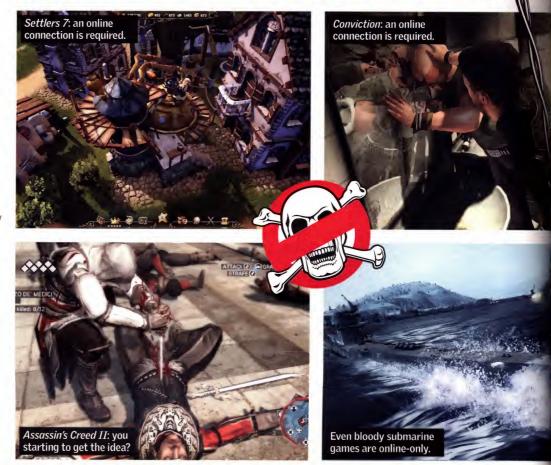
have committed no crime is several

# **BAD MOVES**

The motives behind its online-only policy are understandable. But its execution is heavy-handed in the extreme.

Things aren't all bad though. Piracy is taking PC gaming in new directions. Broadband brought torrents – an ease of piracy beyond having a mate with a CD burner – but it's also brought ways in which gaming can adapt and evolve. Microtransactions, free games with paid-for content, subscriptions, in-game reward systems – for we PC gamers, piracy might just be the thing that revitalises PC gaming, for both players and publishers, and makes it stand out from the console crowd.

In the immediate future, the reason that Assassin's Creed 2 and Splinter Cell: Conviction's demands have garnered a little more outcry than EA's





"The public now expect information to be free, and it's going to be very difficult to reverse this expectation"



#### **ADVERTISING FEATURE**



# FOOTBALL NOW SUPERSTARS

The free-to-play online sports game that delivers the teamwork of football in a brand new way

**DEVELOPER M**onumental Games **PUBLISHER** CyberSports **WEBSITE** footballsuperstars.com

UMMY 'GUMS' BEAR takes to the field for his first match, a newcomer to football with everything to prove. He has no skills yet, but his natty faux-hawk already makes him look the part.

The opposing team kicks off and Gums darts in, stealing the ball and rushing down the left flank. With opposing players hot on his heels, he crosses the ball into the centre, where it's swiftly headed into the net by a teammate. The goal scorer gets the glory, but Gummy's efforts throughout the rest

of the game earn him Man of the Match After only a single game *Football Superstars* reveals the reason it's so compelling: it nails the competition and the teamwork of football.

Where most football games put you in control of an entire team, Football Superstars works differently. A free-to-play massively multiplayer game, you directly control a single footballer you create yourself. That means every other player on the pitch, goalkeeper excluded, is also controlled by another human. This has two results. The first is that every







successful pass feels satisfying because you're not just fighting the other team, but working cooperatively to do it. The second is that you're competing against not just your opponents, but also your own team's players; for the money and experience that unlock new skills and equipment, and the fame points that let you live the lifestyle of a footballer.

After creating your character, you enter the game in a coastal city designed like a footballer's Mecca. It's there to give you everything you need to become a

training facilities, where computer-controlled coaches teach you the game's basics. Here you'll learn how to control your player via the third-person perspective and first-person style controls to shoot, tackle and pass. It's intuitive enough that you can pick it up right away, but an RPG skill system provides considerable depth with passive buffs and activated time-limited boosts. The first of these you'll gain will give you basic dribbling abilities, letting you feint in one direction while quickly speeding around players in the other.

#### **GYM'LL FIX IT**

The city contains a gym where you can trade your money and XP to level up Agility, Speed, Spatial Awareness, Strength and Stamina. Gums didn't need any skills or levelling to be immediately useful on the pitch in a Five-a-Side friendly, but both are essential if you're going to compete in larger 11-a-side

matches. But Football Superstars aims to provide not just the on-the-pitch experience of being a footballer, but the lifestyle and celebrity as well. To do this you need to earn Fame Points, by buying fancy clothes (or penguin mascot suits) in the city's many clothes shops, by drinking at trendy restaurants, and by trading experience for interviews with newspaper, radio and TV journalists. Those earned Fame Points then dictate

how much money you gain for each match, letting you go from poor Local Newcomer to wealthy Household Name and beyond.

Each player is

human-controlled.

While the game is free-to-play forever, experienced players who want to explore further can pay £5.99 a month for a Premium account that lets them create their own Player-Controlled Teams. The equivalent of a World of Warcraft guild, these teams place you as the manager of a football team of real human beings. You design the logo and strip. You choose the players. You promote players to coach, team captain, or scouts. You take on the world.

Football Superstars is available to download and play now from footballsuperstars.com.

"Fame points let you live the lifestyle of a footballer"

#### **UPFRONTHOTSHOTS**







# LORD OF THE RINGS: WAR IN THE NORTH

DEVELOPER Snowblind Studios PUBLISHER Warner Bros WEBSITE warinthenorth.com ETA Spring 2011

HEN A SUCCESSFUL franchise gets milked too much, the teats shrivel and the tasty gaming milk curdles and turns into a fetid paste. That's what happened in Lord of the Rings: Conquest, but Warner believe they can

reinvigorate those teats and get the juices flowing the white stuff again.

Enter Lord of the Rings: War in the North, an action-RPG set in the seldom-explored northern areas of Tolkien's Middle-earth. It's a crowded marketplace

the game will be coming into, but with the strength of the Tolkien license behind it and, hopefully, some honest appraisals of the mistakes made by other studios with their games, Snowblind and Warner could be onto a winner.

#### THE BIGGER PICTURE

#### 1. RING PIECES

War in the North is going to be focusing on a number of aspects of Tolkien lore, mixing in a number of concepts from the books and the films. According to Warner it's going to be a mature RPG. We imagine it won't be the kind of mature that sees Gandalf and Frodo indulging in a bit of man-on-hobbit action. (Although some kind of elf romp might not go amiss, but we digress.) It just means there will be some blood in it a bit. Maybe some heads flying off.

#### 2. FRIENDS REUNITED

One of the major selling points is going to be online co-op play, with three people given the opportunity to knock orc heads together in Aragon's name. As a group, you'll be exploring the more mysterious lands of the north, customising your characters and levelling up, the whole RPG shebang. It's being developed by Snowblind Studios, who were responsible for Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. They've never made a PC game before in their company's history, but that doesn't mean they won't surprise us.

#### 3. SPELLBOUND

A contentious issue surrounding recent Lord of the Rings games is the representation of magic. In Tolkien's works magic is only used by Gandalf, Saruman and their three fellow Istari, yet it's always present in fantasy RPGs. As you can see in this image, the guy with the light coming out of him must be a spellcaster, so if you're a stickler for fidelity to Tolkien's lore, you might be gnashing those teeth right about now. Still, it does mean there'll be some whiz-bang special effects and spells to play with.

#### 4. TALK TALK

Most action-RPGs don't focus on dialogue so players can concentrate on hammering pad buttons repeatedly. War in the North is going to be pushing a Mass Effect-style conversation model. If it's transposed into the co-op sections of the game, could really be interesting indeed. News has reached us that the conversation model won't feature the ramifications of BioWare's system, which is a worrying. Is there any point if there are no real consequences to your actions?

#### **5. CLOAK OF DOUBT**

There are lots of unanswered questions about War in the North. For a start, is it speculation to say you might be able to ride this big bird? Chances are that you can't, because it would probably interfere with the lore or something, but it's a possibility. Just think of the things you could do though – like diving down into hordes of orcs and scatter them about the place like bowling pins. Snowblind, if you're reading this, make this happen.

#### **6. BAND OF BROTHERS**

The usual assortment of fantasy RPG races will be available to pick characters from: elves, dwarves and humans. There hasn't been any evidence of any famous characters being included yet or even hobbits being available as a race selection. This is probably because the former are fighting the important battles and infiltrating Mordor, while the latter stay at home and stuff their faces. You'll most likely be a ragtag collection of unnameables, but don't let that get you down. It's likely you'll just be the unsung heroes of an epic tale, just one with more whippets, cloth caps and incomprehensible accents.









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happened with *Bulletstorm*, for me.
On arrival at Epic's North Carolina offices, that was all I knew about the game: the name, and the fact it was being developed by People Can Fly, the Polish wizards behind the entertaining *Painkiller*.

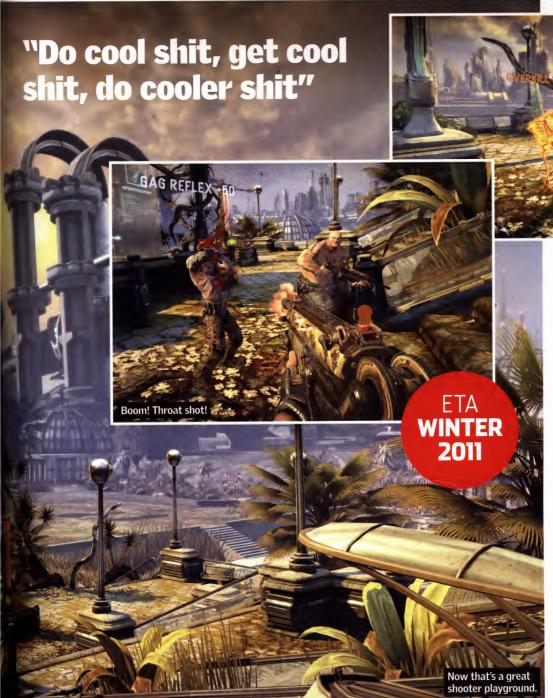
Painkiller was dumb and special and a great introduction to the philosophy underpinning People Can Fly's attitude. Basically, they take pride in letting the player wallow in visceral carnage. So when they introduced themselves to Epic, there was already a sense of mutual understanding respect - one that led to People Can Fly working on the PC port of Gears of War. The port was an unmitigated and PC-friendly success: the reason the sequel didn't come to our platform was, according to Epic's Cliff Blezinski,

#### THE LOWDOWN

- Creative mayhem to be wreaked
- ✓ A broken paradise to play in
- Speedy melee and gunplay
- Will die young from testosterone overload
- Enjoys genital torture a little too much



# 



a simple reaction to the markets of the time. It just didn't seem that rewarding a prospect, and they certainly weren't short of buyers on the Xbox. Thankfully, the decision has been made to use the Unreal Engine for Bulletstorm and, all going well, the game will be released on PC at the same time as on consoles.

Beheaded and melted into a skeleton: 100 points!

#### SO WHAT IS IT

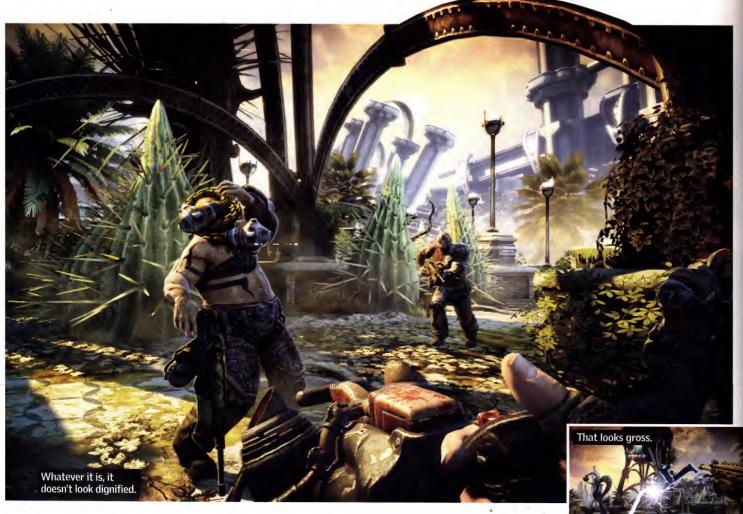
Turns out *Bulletstorm* is a slightly misleading name. The emphasis isn't on a mindless typhoon of ordnance at all. It's about making every kill a special event. You can play the game like a traditional FPS, taking cover like some terrified child, and sniping like a weak-stomached coward who doesn't want to look into his enemies' eyes as they explode. You could do that, just like you could walk through a park with your eyes closed, but you'd be spectacularly missing the point: Bulletstorm rewards creative kills.

Epic describe Bulletstorm with the Circle of Awesome, which is summarised as "Do cool shit, get cool shit, do cooler shit". People Can Fly's Adrian Chmielarz, describes it as "killing with style" adding he wants players to be disappointed with anything less than headshots.

Every kill rewards you with points, ranging from 10 for that



#### **UPFRONTFIRSTLOOK**



disappointing and uninspired murder, to 100 for a meticulously executed multikill. To help you build that score which is used to purchase upgrades -PCF have introduced a number of individually minor tweaks. First is the energy leash - designed to bring items to you. Second, is the slide - not your basic slide into cover, but a speed-boosting method of getting around in its own right. If you find yourself far away from a crowd of feral gang members, slide in and take them out. Third, is the kick which has been powered up from a basic

melee attack into a turbo-hoof. It sends your victim sprawling in slow motion, giving you a chance to plan what else you might want to do.

#### **KICKS GIVE KICKS**

Melee is an big part of Bulletstorm, but so are the over-the-top weapons. PCF are holding back on the full arsenal tucked away in their game, but let's not forget they're the company who invented the shuriken/lightning gun. They deserve the benefit of the doubt, for now. What they are showing is a standard Peacemaker

Carbine, with an upgraded alt-fire that shoots 100 bullets at once. It's equally destructive and stupid. The energy leash gets a Thumper upgrade, allowing you to whip the ground and explode everything in a wide radius directly up into the air.

Don't ask about the science. Just use the chaos to pick off your enemies. The other weapon we're introduced to is the

> Flame Chain, a bolas-like weapon that binds your enemies with a metal chain. The bonus being either

end of the chain can be decorated with grenades. Chmielarz explains the heart of this creative sadism: "We could have made it blow the man up, and once it's around him, he's dead. But it's fun to watch him struggle." It's also useful - you can kick him into a crowd of his mates, and watch him explode with more style.

It's sadism like this that's behind longer, and more unlikely kill awards.

#### **GROWING PAINS** Who do Epic and People Can Fly make games for?

Being People Can Fly - or their daddy company, Epic Games isn't an easy job.

On one hand, they make games which are plainly designed to be plastered with an 18 certificate. On the other hand, even a light reading of the letters in Epic Games' lobby let you know that they actually appeal equally to troubled seven year-olds. So, we've compiled a list of ways in which the companies are batting for the grown-ups and the kids.

On the adult side, Epic's Cliff Bleszinski is currently refusing to answer to the name that made him famous, Cliffy B. He wants to be taken seriously now, and is, after all, 35 years-old. However, a simple Google Image search for his name will always include him waving a chainsaw gun in the air, like an overjoyed hairy infant. Who are you, Cliff?

Meanwhile, Gears of War had a strong artistic theme of "destroyed beauty". This

translated mainly into grey rubble, but still - that's pretty deep, isn't it? And PCF have followed suit with their theme of "defiled paradise", which at least allows for some vivid greens. But Epic have added a romantic interest to Gears of War 2 - that's well grown up.

So if they're so grown up, how come they're having a slide installed in their office to get to reception, and drive sports cars

Not the look of a mature man.

with the number plate

"AWESOME"? Big bloody babies. And then there's the Unreal Engine: a game design tool that's proved so flexible, and been so expertly marketed, that it's made everyone involved absurdly rich. and Epic Games completely recession-proof. Well, you can't really argue with that. You just have to admit that Epic and People Can Fly are companies who know how to tap into the jabbering child inside us all.







For instance, you can shoot a gang member in the balls, then the head. That gets you the tongue-in-cheek Mercy award. Or you can whip someone into melee range, shoot them in the balls, then kick them in the head. This prolonged, individual attention earns you the sexually charged "Boy Toy" award.

There's something about this that I find unsettling - it's an unambiguously heterosexual world, designed to appeal to the fist-pumping jocks and pre-teens who enjoyed Gears. So this combination of sexual jokes and sadistic violence leave a slightly bitter taste in the mouth. But there's a subtle difference between the misogyny of Bulletstorm's star - which gets dealt with in the story by a strong



#### "Something about this I find unsettling"

female character - and these titles. which are more like direct winks from the developer to the gamer.

Of course, I'm also open to the idea that I'm an over-sensitive gav. who's having a sense of humour failure. You're welcome to make your own mind up.

#### **BOOM! BALLSHOT!**

So, it's pretty clear that this is a brash, pulp story that puts little stock in sophistication. But that doesn't mean they've neglected the storyline. In fact, Chmielarz is rightfully proud of roping in Rick Remender, the Marvel Comics writer who penned Dead Space. So you can expect something more engaging and elegantly told than Painkiller's story of "man kills everything in hell".

You are Grayson Hunt, a 26th Century assassin in the Dead Echo squad, you're

tasked with taking down the terrorists. rebels and ne'erdowells who threaten the Confederation. The opening level of the game, which acts as a prologue and a tutorial, tells the story of Hunt's exile. During a mission to kill a man responsible for the deaths of thousands of innocent civilians, he discovers that he's fighting on the wrong side: it becomes obvious that the terrorist leader is one of the good guys, and Hunt's own work is a lot dirtier than he's happy with.

Refusing to pull the trigger, Hunt and his cyborg sidekick, Ishi Sato, are immediately condemned as traitors by the charismatic General Sarrano, and forced into a fugitive life of piracy. And so, for 10 years, that's how it goes. A bawdy life of space drink, space misogyny, and flipping space traffic wardens the intergalactic bird. All while

your cyborg companion offers thoughtful and completely ignored advice.

That all changes when you're cruising the bum-end of the universe, and you stumble across Sarrano's ship, the warbird Ulysses. The temptation and resentment is too much for Hunt to bear, and Sato's objections are far too weak, and he decides to take it on. The attack is suicidal, but Hunt manages to fly into the engines of the Ulysses, incapacitating both ships. The last we see of the space prologue of Bulletstorm are three escape capsules pelting towards the planet Stygia, which the Ulysses was orbiting.

While Gears of War modelled itself on "destroyed beauty", the aesthetic catchphrase guiding Bulletstorm's art direction is "defiled paradise". Stygia gives all the impressions of a once-Utopian resort, but the deserted streets, over-grown architecture and evacuation signs paints a story of catastrophe and decay.

Unusually, this is where Bulletstorm decides to go realistic. Instead of littering the world with unlikely audio logs, the story is told through the information panels designed for the tourists, or simply through context - like those evacuation signs. As you play, the mysteries will unfold - what was this planet? Why did it all go a bit BioShock? And what was Sarrano doing in orbit around the planet in the first place?

I went to Epic's offices a suspicious and sceptical man. The only upside of knowing nothing about the game was the fact that I didn't really have to do much research. But at this first look presentation, I was quickly convinced: this actually looks like it'll be a blast to play, and both developers specialise in making games that feel as satisfying as they look.

If Bulletstorm is even a fraction of the brash, dumb fun to play as it is to watch, then I can't wait for a hands-on.

#### **UPFRONTHOTSHOT**



HIS BLUE WONDER'S firmly grabbed the PCZ office by the delicates since landing on our laps this month: a Laser Squad Nemesis meets old Rainbow Six's planning phase meets Flotilla strategy mash-up which, crucially, requires your attention only for attention-snapping moments at a time. Carefully plot your turn while your opponent plots theirs, before both of your

best made plans are carried out simultaneously. The challenge is in anticipating what the other player is up to, pre-empting his every step like some ghoulish supervillain. Fans of alt-tabbing between your real job and delightful distractions rejoice - it's available in beta form right now.



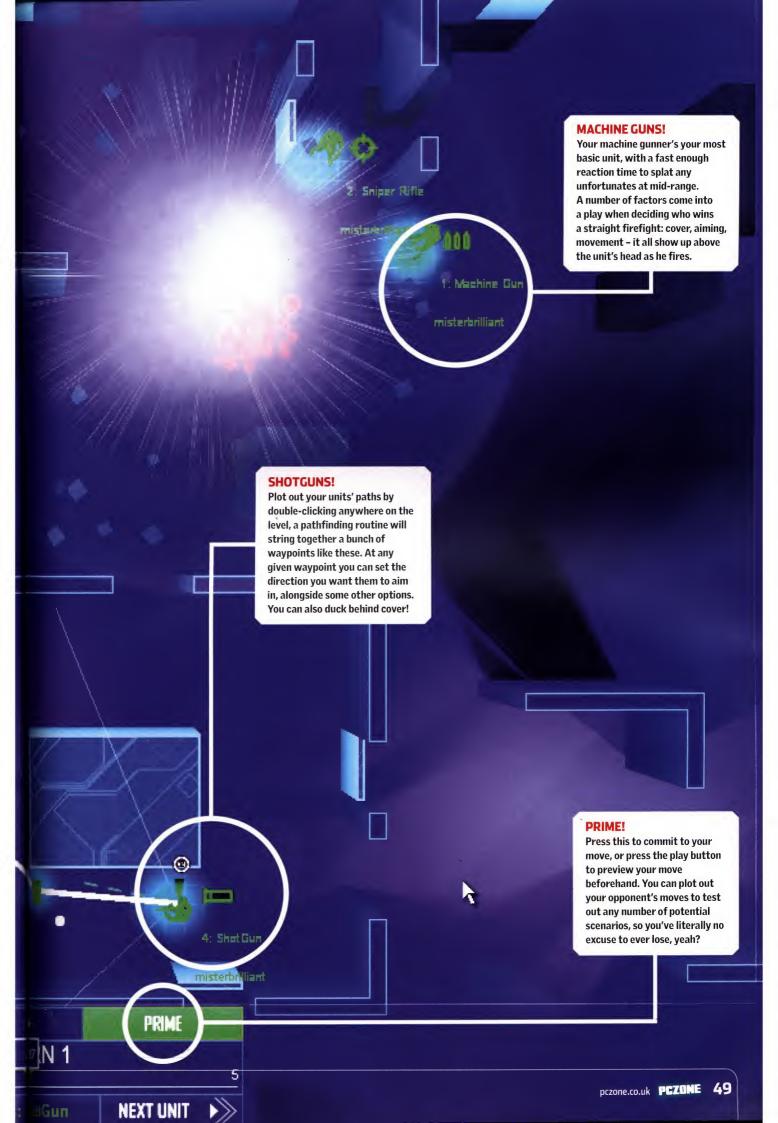
#### **ROCKETS!**

Your rocket units don't fire on other units, instead you order them to fire at nearby walls in the hope of creating some bloody smears in the collateral damage. They're slow to reload, and can only fire once in a five-second turn, so keep them behind cover.

#### SNIPER!

Snipers are powerful units, capable of firing right the way across a level. Position them at windows overlooking corridors for maximum effect. They'll never beat a shotgun or a machine gun at close or mid-range, but at a distance they're unstoppable.







## **ARMA II: OPERATION** ARROWHEAD

ETA **29 JUNE 2010** 

The military ultra-sim heads to the middle-east

**DEVELOPER** Bohemia Interactive **PUBLISHER** IDEA Games **WEBSITE** www.arma2.com

**HOSE VIDEOS ON YouTube of** people creating huge helicopter and tank-filled battles were genuinely awe-inspiring. Sadly, ArmA II's best bits were merely setpieces, the quality of the underlying game checked by glitches and errors.

Thankfully, Operation Arrowhead, a standalone expansion to ArmA II, aims to put all of the wrongs right, allowing the average gamer a chance to join the party, while keeping the commitment to depth and detail we've all come to admire.

The game will be a virtual melting pot of genres, with RPG and RTS elements melding with the core

#### THE LOWDOWN

- Still epic
- Still gorgeous
- **UAVs**
- Branching plotline
- Bugs not an issue...
- 3 ...they say

hardcore shooter experience, all adding up to what could be a unique take on the serious military FPS. We've heard ambitious things like this before from Bohemia, but this time it's looking more likely that they're going to deliver.

#### **NEW WAVE**

First of all, there's the new campaign. Set in the fictional Middle Eastern nation of Takistan, (which, translated into Czech, means "Another-stan") this main trunk of the game will be much more plot-driven than before, with a branching story and multiple endings.

Using the same engine as ArmA II, there's been plenty of buffing, polishing and tweaking going on since it first appeared on our radar. You'd expect it, especially if you've had the benefit of playing a fully patched ArmA II, to run a lot better than it originally did. It's no longer going to grind to a halt the moment anything interesting happens.

Pushing the game more towards mainstream production values doesn't mean Bohemia have forgotten their

core fans. There's still plenty for them to get excited about, including more than 300 new units, weapons and vehicles, multiple factions (USA, UN, Takistani army, and guerillas) and even the addition of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV), equipped with night vision and thermal imaging systems. The desert setting also allows for Bohemia to spread their wings a little, used as they are to shooters in 'greener' locations.

Finally, there's multiplayer and the comprehensive mission and map editor. The former supports over 50 players, plus hundreds of AI units, and the latter is still surprisingly intuitive. There's also an SDK kit for modders, which should produce some interesting results.

Operation Arrowhead is Bohemia's final big push to make ArmA II more than just that game you were interested in but, at the same time, scared to death of. The evidence so far indicates they could finally have nailed it. The proof is naturally in the playing, but it could be that ArmA II's potential has been realised after all this time.







computerandvideogames.com



THINK I just had an accident in my trousers. Sorry about that, but any mention of The Witcher can cause undesirable results in my nether regions. It's the sort of game that inspires devotion and love, not because it was perfect, but because it tried to go beyond the obvious.

While it didn't always succeed, the important thing was that it tried, and in today's world of ultra-generic military

shooters and pointy-haired Sino-American RPGs, it's more important than ever for games to offer an original, unique experience. With playing cards of naked women.

Forget about them in the second game, though. CD Projekt are tossing them out with the old bathwater and concentrating on making a properly mature game, but don't think that that aspect of the game is completely wiped

from history. Romance and sex are still very much part of all things Temeria (the land The Witcher 2 is set in) but they'll be handled in a subtler way than a short movie and a pornographic playing card. How deep this will go is unknown, but at least accusations of schoolboy attitudes towards sex will be easily dismissed from now on. But of course, there's more to The Witcher than nude women.

As CD Projekt are a relatively small developer, the first game made use of a heavily modified version of BioWare's Aurora engine, which held its own on the visuals front. It didn't lend itself to producing the expansive areas that  $\ensuremath{\mathsf{CD}}$ Projekt wanted, which is one of the reasons they decided to ditch that engine and create their own from scratch. This one will allow for much bigger environments to trot around in,

# Would you mess with Geralt? Nope, we wouldn't either.

## "Romance and sex are still very much part of things, but they'll be handled in a subtler way"





with CD Projekt happily claiming that a single area from the first game would fit into one from the second many times over. Cities will now feel more like bustling metropolises, while vistas in the countryside will stretch out farther than a video card can render.

Time for a little refresher course on all things Witcher: in the first game, you took control of Geralt of Rivia, a master swordsman who has earned unnatural powers of agility and self-preservation through using body altering mutagens. Decried by the community at large,

Geralt and his fellow Witchers, bounty hunters hired to rid the world of monsters, are few in number. At the end of the game, regardless of what path you chose to follow (either supporting the racist Order of the Flaming Rose, the rebellious elves and dwarves, or remaining neutral) you saved King Foltest from being stabbed up by a mysterious assailant.

#### **NEW BEGINNING**

That's where you would have left off in the first game and the second continues down the neutral path, with the land still wracked by factional strife. By the time the story starts, the Order have been almost defeated, while relations between the Scoia'tel (non-human rebels) and the authorities are frosty. However, the situation is more stable than it's been for a while and Geralt is on his way to La Valette castle, the home of a baroness who is still resisting King Foltest's attempts to restore order. As the story progresses, the significance of the assassin who Geralt defeated at the end of the first game becomes clear.

This becomes the main thread of the story, a tale that takes Geralt to new areas of Temeria. There'll be no revisits to locations seen in the first game, so forget about going back to Vizima to see what's going down there. As you know, the new areas will be more than double the size of the old ones, and another exciting factoid is that they won't be crippled by loading screens. They'll all be loaded in once and you can flit between all the different areas of the city at your will, which also includes building interiors.

While you might not be returning to familiar locales, you will be meeting up with some old friends. Wily witch Triss

#### THE LOWDOWN

- Geralt
- More game-changing choices
- More mature, in a good way
- Better combat
- New engine...
- ...more bugś?

#### **UPFRONTFIRSTLOOK**







"This time around, there'll be more decisions and the consequences will run much deeper"



#### MERRIGOLD

A powerful and scheming witch, Triss also likes to spend time wearing very revealing clothing and bossing our hero about.

#### **DANDELION**

A fop and famed poet, Dandelion the bard likes to fool around and has a habit for causing irate husbands and fathers to want him dead.

#### **GERALT**

The white-haired mutant is a hit with the ladies, even if he is almost emotionless and spends most of his time in cemeteries

#### **ZOLTAN CHIVAY**

A veteran of the Second Nilfgaard war, Zoltan used to own a talking parrot, which he sold to a gnome in Novigrad.

Some of the returning characters in *The Witcher 2* 



WIEDZMIN



WAITING FOR GOO







Merrigold will be about, as will the bumbling bard Dandelion and Zoltan the dwarf. The rest of Temeria's populace will be much more reactive to how you carry out your Witcher duties, but it's not going to be a binary thing, it's more about the general attitude you display in conversations. Obviously, the bigger decisions will have more of an effect on things and CD Projekt will be certain to make a big deal out of these gamechanging events.

That you could make decisions at an early point in the game that changed the way things happened much later, but not always in an obvious way, was one of the major selling points of the original. This time around, there'll be more decisions and the consequences will run much deeper. Some places will be dramatically different depending on the choices you make earlier on.

Those choices will also be made more interesting for us Anglophiles by the mere fact our language is being used as the primary language in the game. While it might rightly annoy Polish speakers to see a game from their country made in English, the consolation for us is that we won't be getting the substandard translation the original Witcher suffered from on release (and was corrected in the Enhanced Edition).

#### CHOP CHOP

The Witcher was also famous for its combat, in both good and bad ways. A pause-able real-time affair, you could build up combos using timed mouse clicks, while set into three different stances depending on the type of enemy you were facing.

When it worked, it was a wonderful system, allowing for smooth, graceful combat moves to be pulled off and some incredible finishers to be implemented, such as jumping on the shoulders of an enemy and driving a sword deep into the top of its skull. However, when it didn't work, combos kept breaking down too easily and it could get a little repetitive. This is an area CD Projekt are scrutinising with a big old microscope, making sure they get it right this time.

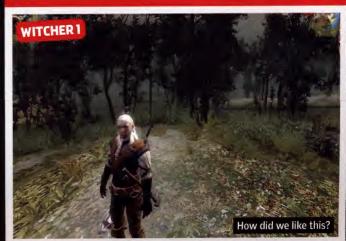
One thing that is definitely remaining is the distinctive stances - fast, group and heavy. In The Witcher 2, they won't be as separate as before. CD Projekt are aiming to allow for players to mix them together to produce a better flow to the combat.

Potion creation will be made less fiddly this time - more a matter of just making sure you have the right ingredients without having to go through the whole meditation and bubbling cauldron thing. In fact, the whole issue of character inventory and progression has been addressed. While not a major issue last time, your inventory could get cluttered up easily, so there are moves afoot to make sure this doesn't happen so much.

As for levelling up, it'll be interesting to see how CD Projekt deal with the beginning of the game. They can't go for

#### **GREEN, GREEN GRASS**

How much difference does a new engine make?





Instead of just re-licensing the old Aurora engine, CD Projekt have gone down the difficult route of building one of their own from scratch. As you can see, the difference between old and new Witchers is remarkable. Beautiful lighting, detailed foliage and all without any load times between areas. It used to be said that the original game looked pretty snazzy, but how wrong we were. The new one blows it out of the swamp in this case.

the easy amnesiac route used in the first game, so will new players start out as a hardcore killer or a guy who doesn't know which end of the sword to hold? Ignoring that for the time being, what there definitely will be are fewer different categories to level up in.

#### SKILLED DOWN

In the first game, there were a host of different magic powers, plus others related to combat, physique, mental strength and things like that. This time, the skills tree has been squished down into only a few branches, but these have been extended substantially to allow for more options than before.

There's one final point left to deal with and that's the fact a console version of the game is being produced. Usually, the very mention of a crossplatform release is enough to chill the hearts of all but the hardiest souls, but this time, it might not be so bad. In fact, CD Projekt have been quoted as saying "We've not spent a lot of time on the design interface for the console," which surely gladdens the hearts and minds of all right-thinking PC owners.

A lot more information will come flooding out of eastern Europe over the coming months as the PR campaign begins in earnest, but for now we know a few encouraging things to keep us going. The combat is going to be more fluid, the inventory system will be streamlined, as will character levelling. And the choices the player makes will have more of a significant difference to the world, which in itself, promises to be substantially larger.

Most importantly, you'll still be able to get your end away with plenty of women in a much more mature fashion. Whatever will Julie Peasgood think of that?









a fraction of the greatness of the villain's whole) and the chase shall begin. What's more, to ensure the highest level of funness is suckled from APB's almighty teats, both factions will be roaming in groups, each hollering at a bound gang of chums over VOIP - the Enforcers out to inflict their own brand of justice, and the Criminals watching the filth gradually amass in their wing mirrors.

Let's not run away with ourselves though, as once the character creation Enforcer/Criminal divide has been crossed there's still a way to go. Simply put, APB has the most powerful tools yet seen in an MMO to sculpt the persona you want to carry through your travails

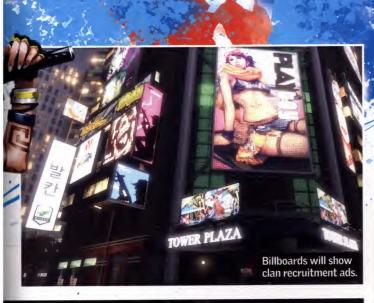
you ever get tired of something you love constantly emanding that you subscribe to it? We do. High quality onthly products are always at it. "Subscribe to this and a free gift!", "Look a picture of a woman. Subscribe! if we don't want to make a saving of 25% per issue? Vell, Realtime Worlds share our hate – a *World of Warcraft*-tyle monthly rate is not on the cards. Nor, it seems, is the online ogue of microtransactions and an in-game economy mewhat fuelled by your own bank balance. At the time of writing the exact method of continued payment for APB hasn't been announced, but this correspondent can't help feel that it'll follow the Guild Wars pattern, with new districts and attributed game modes eing released in paid-for bundles at regular intervals the main game's release. Consider it speculation, ut it's hard to imagine any other way it could k. Unless you'll be buying bullets in

ne way you do when you

within San Paro. Fiddling with your appearance is a slider bar orgy of muscles, visible veins, age, chest hair and ear orientation - after which you'll appear in nothing but a pair of boxers in APB's social district.

#### **GETTING DRESSED**

This is the one area in which Enforcers and Criminals can hang out together, trying to maintain conversation while nearly-naked faction members with wonky half-done faces are continually born into thin air over by the customisation terminals. At these terminals APB's wondrous selfimprovement systems go far beyond simple pointing and clicking at garments:





they allow you to design your own symbols and fonts to use as graffiti, tattoos or car decals in-game, to buy and customise vehicles in which anything can be fiddled with from the noise, the siren makes to the symbols on the bonnet, and finally to create your own audio in APB's very own sound suite.

All this is explored in more detail in the Augmenting Realities boxout, but the message needs to pepper this preview like a spent Uzi rounds: APB's avatar customisation tools are mindblowing. It boggle the mind that so much information can fit down a crap BT Broadband connection.

Not everyone is good with colours though, and design might not be your

thing, in which case the in-game economy spreads to auction houses where designs, clothing, weaponry and triumphant sound files for your victims to endure upon the moment of their death can be purchased. It's easy to forget sometimes, but this is an MMO mailboxes abound, and elsewhere in the Social District you'll find nightclubs where you and your brethren can /dance the night away. In keeping with APB's desire to create a feeling of in-game celebrity, statues of successful players who have won daily, weekly and monthly leagues will take centre stage. You'll no doubt be gazing at their plinths wistfully as you corral your troops, or prepare to leap into the fray with a buddy who's

"You can run people over just dandy, because it's hilarious"



DAVE JONES CREATIVE DIRECTOR, REALTIME WORLDS

#### LAW AND CHAOS

We rootle through Dave Jones' locker, and upon discovery make up some questions to placate him

#### Will APB tell a story?

"There's a big story behind the city of San Paro to do with the mayor and the characters in it. We focus a lot on the characters, the contacts and the organisations, and all of them have interesting backstories as well.

"I think there's about 45 different contacts, and every one of them has a bit of storyline behind them. There's also something with the whole Criminal/Enforcer thing: the reason we called them Enforcers and not Cops is because the Criminals aren't necessary criminals. It's more that they're not liking what the city has become, and the fact that they feel that the enforcement side is actually pretty corrupt.

"So there's a story there, and it's something we plan to unveil and change as time goes on."

#### Are some areas of the map more dangerous than others?

"We've been playing internally with what we call the Chaos District, which is one in which you can shoot anyone at any time. As you can imagine, that's a different game. Completing a mission where anyone can shoot you is pretty damn hard. You could

accidentally run over someone and they could start shooting at you. Within five minutes it could turn into war. It's for more experienced players, and you ought to go in there pretty well armed. We want to roll the Chaos Districts out soon after launch."

#### How will the game change after it's launched?

"Well as players say 'Hey I think with these particular tweaks this would be a more interesting game' we will absolutely have districts with different rule sets. So Chaos is one rule set, but there'll be different styles of the game that we make available to

"Because of the way our system works, as more people go to those districts - if they're popular then we can start to make more with those kinds of rule sets. If we launched tomorrow, in three months we may find that people prefer another rule set from the one at launch - and the game would just dynamically have more of those districts. I'm hopeful that six months after launch we'll have many different kinds of games within APB, and that people will migrate to the one that they love."

already out in the districts ridding the streets of crime, or doing their best to riddle them with it.

#### **ORGANISED CRIME**

As you enter a 100-player server there'll predictably be a fair degree of activity on the streets: hoodlums tossing pedestrian bodies in their wake, Enforcers leaping off ramps with their red and blue lights ablaze, and all that jazz. An important thing to note is that until a crimefighter has been match-made against you (or until you've had an APB call if you're the filth) then you won't be able to kill any human players with weaponry. You can run people over just dandy, mainly because it's hilarious, but a bullet freefor-all would rob the game of that vital commit crime-chasey chase dynamic.

As an Enforcer it's down to you to wander over to a terminal that will conjure up your personal car and patrol the streets or react to match-making call-outs from the APB mainframe. For the opposing side petty crime might be the order of the day, or perhaps a sequence of tasks from an NPC contact mission givers that instantly bring the contact system of City of Heroes to mind. Each contact represents a different organisation, and the further you level through each underworld outfit the better cars and weapons that are made available to you.

The controls of the game will be familiar to anyone who's ever fired a gun in simulated anger: left-click to fire, WASD to move, right-click to bring the camera down over

#### UPFRONTHANDS-ON

#### AUGMENTING REALITIES

APB's self-improvement tools go under the knife



#### **PERSONA**

The basic physical attributes of your character can be tweaked in every conceivable direction: from the colour of your nail polish, to the visibility of the veins running beneath your skin via the number of wrinkles, scars, moles and pockmarks that are scattered over your face. Big hair is also available.



#### DESIGNER

Designs made in APB can either be used to decorate yourself and your car, or shared with your clan so you can all hit the streets in the same nattily designed threads, or indeed, the same graffiti spray. This is where APB's design tools start getting a bit more complex, so it's likely good designers will make a killing at the auction house.



#### WARDROBE

You can either purchase clothes with ready designed symbols and colouration, or if you're something of a fashionista you can do the design work yourself. Everything - from gloves and goggles to trousers and tops - can be tweaked or imprinted, and the catalogue of clothing rivals even Freemans'.



Here you'll be able to deck your car out in the chosen colours of your particular crib, as well as fiddle with the fender and, if you're an Enforcer, attach whatever brand of flashing lights you might fancy. How Realtime Worlds are going to stop players branding their bonnets with goatses is as yet unknown, though they probably won't be pleased when someone does.



In terms of providing targets to use these on though, it all depends on your gang's kill/death ratios, how far up the game's unlock ladders you've all gone and the notoriety you've all built up over the past few minutes in the game. This will then matchmake Enforcers that are the closest fit (balancing both numbers and skill levels) and send them after you.

Despite the veneer of Cops and Robbers, most of the challenges are instantly familiar: assaults on specific areas, king of the hill, protect the VIP, team deathmatch - essentially short bursts of those same modes that've made online gaming simultaneously great and samey over the past decade.

Here, however, each burst is intermingled with hectic chases from location to location - and if one faction arrives before another then they can do their best to set up shop for the battle ahead barricading areas with stolen cars, and taking up the best sniper positions. After this burning vehicles unexpectedly plough through tunnels full of cops with hilarious results, Enforcers dazzle their prey with stun grenades and arrest them (forcing them out of the game for longer than the usual respawn time) and bullets fill the air

Once the mission chain is over, due to a faction victory or the time limit being hit, plaudits and cash are doled out to the worthy and battle ceases. Everyone stands, once more unable to shoot each other, and share a happily awkward post-

"GTA mechanics you expect aren't present or aren't as honed"



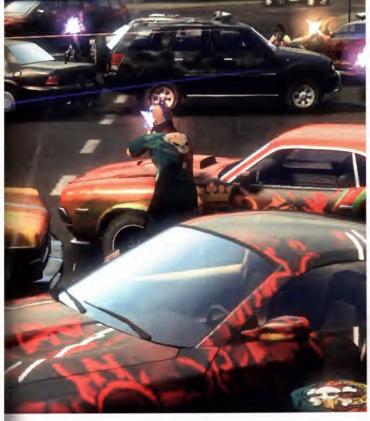


action breather before going their separate ways. Some choose to /dance.

My personal highlight during my playtest as a criminal came when I tormented a defeated Enforcer with an exploratory /wave amidst the burning wreckage of our previous dealings. There was a pause of a few seconds as my foe worked out how to return a friendly salutation, as I watched a friend steal a sports car 50 metres behind him and accelerate towards his back.

I estimate the Enforcer got through around four frames of his happy waving animation before his broken ragdoll somersaulted skywards. I could honestly have died laughing.

It's these moments of unscripted hilarity that APB frequently delights with. Your first hours within its districts will be happy ones indeed, but as to whether the game will retain you for the





hundreds of hours that a successful MMO expects of its players is still an unknown quantity. An opening problem is an unfair, yet important, consideration: APB is not Grand Theft Auto IV.

#### **GHOST OF NICO**

This is pernickety, but almost everyone who goes into *APB* will have experienced Niko Bellic's adventures – and when you first play the game there's a mental barrier in that the *Grand Theft Auto* mechanics you expect either aren't present or aren't (in *APB*'s beta at least) as honed. It seems strange that you can't shoot a driver through a windscreen, it niggles that the car-exit animations are laborious in comparison to Rockstar's, the lack of motorbikes is evident, and the grungy character of Liberty City is absent in the wipe-clean exteriors of San Paro.

Most of these issues could be cleared up as the game develops over the months and years post-release, of course, but I can't sit here and pretend that I didn't feel sad when *APB*'s burning cars didn't blow up in the fashion to which I am accustomed. Crimes such as ramraiding and mugging too seem somewhat mechanical and, I dare say, MMO-ey. Shallow and unthinking criticisms I know, but I can't deny what my brain told me it was thinking.

A larger issue is simply whether APB's combat is too simplistic, and whether over time familiarity will dim the pleasures of the relatively basic multiplayer conceits that adorn the top layer of a frankly remarkable playermatching system. The back-end of APB is so clever, so complex and so ingenious that the actual top-end gameplay does seem a little facile in comparison - it doesn't feel that there's much room for hugely tactical play, for example, and you frequently find yourself standing stock-still as you hose an enemy with bullets rather than frantically dashing around the place to seek cover.

place to seek cover.

Then again, as
with all MMOs, the
release of *APB* is
widely seen as the
beginning of its
ongoing development rather
than Dave Jones whipping his
scarf over his shoulder and
saying "And that's the end of
that chapter!" There's a
three-year plan in place, and
the game will evolve
according to player demand:
new areas will be made



available, new game modes will emerge and existing mechanics will be tweaked.

and existing mechanics will be tweaked.
As you wander around Real Time
Worlds' studios it's clear that there are
plans to somehow incorporate what are
potentially more scripted engagements
from enigmatic scribbles on
whiteboards – events like bank
jobs, heists and raids on
supermarkets. You genuinely begin
to feel that the Financial and
Waterfront districts are something
of the tip of the iceberg, and that
a mass of potential content is
waiting beneath the waterline.

**FUN WITH GUNS**Right now, as the game enters

its final beta stages, APB is

a remarkable framework for

remarkable. Or at least, that's the dream. We are entering a world bereft of nightly police-based entertainment what with those bastards at ITV thoughtlessly cancelling The Bill after 27 years of highquality programming. APB genuinely looks like it could fill the gaping void that's due to open up at 9pm on a Thursday – and on other days in-between. It's even got a character customisation suite that will let us recreate DCI Frank Burnside, DS Jim Carver, PC Reg Hollis, and perhaps even the one with the moustache that had all those drink problems. For this, most of all, we should be grateful.

a year later I'm fairly confident it will be

unscripted frivolity. The dream is that upon release, with the expert guidance of us the in-game gun-toting madmen, Realtime Worlds can build ever higher on the remarkable back-end they've constructed. I can safely vouch that upon release APB will be good, but

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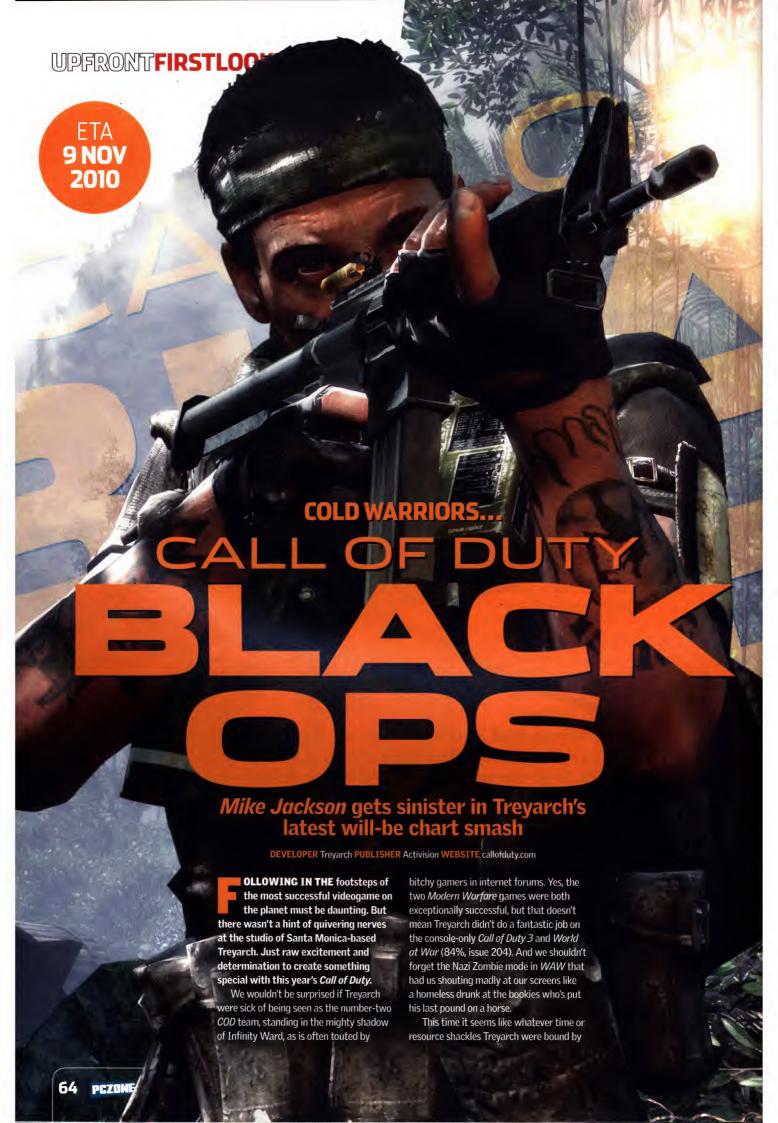


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PCZONE - Last one to subscribe is a grubby pair of cheap iPod earphones





#### **UPFRONTFIRSTLOOK** You could hide behind dense foliage. Or not... Black ops hide and seek. Mm, lavender scented. Get to the chopper! missions in the Modern Warfare Leaving the base sees you creeping game's close-quarters scrapping, which titles. Within a minute your control along the side of a snow-covered uses an enhanced World at War AI. Tech demos later in the day showed switches to a soldier on the ground mountain when some buffoon shoots who's tasked with sneaking through the an RPG your way. An avalanche is us some of the techniques which the snowy mountainous environment into triggered and things go mental as you Spetsnaz - one of many foes in the an enemy base. sprint along the cliff and leap down. game - will use. These Soviet special forces troops don't just duck and pop This was our taste of Black Op's **HUE'S THERE?** stealth gameplay, as our lad had to out from cover, but work in squads to avoid enemy patrols rather than nail This mission showed the expansive flank your position, and intelligently roll environments you'll encounter in the them with the meaty looking crossbow and dive to avoid taking a bullet to the in his hand. game, of which Treyarch promise there commie-noggin. Later sees you abseiling down a cliff will be a great number. They didn't go Next we hit the jungle to fight the face. It looks incredible - despite the into detail about what you'll see, but NVA (North Vietnamese Army) and the blizzard-like conditions you can see the they did show us another mission with Viet Cong guerillas, who were far less a vastly different setting. professional but suicidal in their detailed scenery stretching into the distance, with your objective clearly The closed-in streets of Hue City, attempts to kill Americans. First you visible before you're anywhere near it. Vietnam, was the scene of our next thrill crash land a helicopter before swimming ride, the highlight of which was the through muddy jungle waters to emerge As you approach the base, you're told behind a Viet Cong and use him as player's ability to call in a helicopter to to keep things quiet and use your normal bolts, but should you draw shoot up an area of their liking. The a human shield. attention to yourself you have the chopper flies in and fills nearby enemies Aiming over your hostage's shoulder, Suddenly a whale explosive-tipped types at hand. These with holes before taking off to await you take out his pals before dispensing surfaced. stick in your enemy before detonating, your next command from a safe of him, and moving on to blow the snot sending other nearby goons flying. distance. It also gave us a taste of the out of the jungle with machine guns, rockets and all sorts of sweet hardware "Hue City, Vietnam, was the scene Holding this demonstration in a small room with a huge projector screen and of our next thrill ride" some bassy speakers showed just how





SOLD! Treyarch is acquired by publishing glant Activision.



A GOOD 'UN
COD: World at War
appears. So do Nazi
zombles. Hurrah.

1998

2001

200

#### **WALK LIKE AN EGYPTIAN**

Motion capture improves but characters still need a poo...

During our visit we witnessed some the newest motion capture technology being used in games today. In a studio comparable to those used for films like *Avatar*, Treyarch told us how it's only fairly recently become possible for developers to capture not just the bodily movements, but facial expressions and voices of actors simultaneously. Previously, each of these would have been captured separately, sometimes with different actors, and artificially pasted together in editing. The result of this new tech means a more fluid cinematic experience with dialogue that fits naturally with the action on screen and facial expressions that tie it all together nicely. Shame they still haven't managed to figure out how to make a game character not look like he's in need of the loo as he runs though. Look, he visibly clenching it.

The mocap really does make a difference.

beefy some of the weapons – and the sounds they make – really are. Even before we're allowed to take the controls we know *Black Ops* will be a mightily visceral experience to anyone with a proper setup.

The VC don't care for taking cover and all that malarkey: they run at you screaming like possessed maniacs, keeping you on edge when it's quiet and forcing you to be quick on the trigger. This is especially the case when you take to the dark and claustrophobic underground tunnels the VC dug to hide from American forces.

Being a temporary tunnel rat is a heart-pumping ordeal as you and your allies take turns to lead a slow, cautious advance through dark tunnels. And you're unnerved even further when a VC springs from the darkness and plunges a knife into your ally's chest before you can do anything about it. It's like *Resident Evil* without the zombies: you don't know what's going to jump out at you.

In this level alone you get a sense of the variety Treyarch is talking about –

one minute you're blasting wooden structures to smithereens with a bazooka like a Rambo wannabe, and the next you're creeping nervously through a dingy tunnel hoping you're not about to take a blade to the face.

#### **BAD GUY COCKTAIL**

Already we'd seen a variety of enemies and there are more to be fought in the full game, Treyarch tells us, continuing the day's emphasis on variety. Differing enemies, they say, will be one of the pillars of change in the game, along with the environments and an extensive list of weapons, promises the developer.

The last level shown was a proper finale: you set upon an outpost with an eye to commandeering a meaty Hind gunship. After a brief shoot out you saddle up and take to the skies, controlling the craft freely as you blast everything in sight with chain guns and rockets.

Helicopters tend to be tough to control in games but this one won't be, promises Treyarch.
The demo was being played



STUDIO HEAD, TREYARCH

### TREYARCH OF THE COVENANT

PC ZONE asks Mark Lamia what divine promises Treyarch are making for our grey boxes...

Have you made the game to work with NVIDIA 3D Vision?

Yes. We actually made World at War to work with NVIDIA's stereo 3D and we'll be continuing that with this game. Everyone who sees it says 'wow' – it looks amazing.

#### How long will the campaign be for during the average playthrough?

We're aiming for a similar amount of campaign gameplay as *Call of Duty* games tend to have [that's typically between 5-7 hours], but we want to pack in a whole lot more around that. Overall I believe it'll be one of the best value products available this holiday. We're more concerned with quality over quantity.

How committed are you to the PC version, and is piracy a concern?

We're not thinking of dropping the PC. I don't know what's around the corner, but that was never a consideration. We have a dedicated PC team.

Any creative team is concerned when its work is pirated, so I'm not going to tell you not releasing a game on PC is not something we'd consider, but I think we have to solve that problem, not ditch the platform.

I know as a developer of many PC games, and a PC gamer, that the PC isn't going anywhere.

How should developers go about addressing the issue of piracy on PC? I think it has the same digital issues as a lot of other products, whether books,

movies, music: we all have to figure out how to solve the issue, and I think the way to do that is to make buying a superior experience. That's how we're trying to solve it.

Hopefully people value their time more than they value pirating, and so we provide users with such a superior experience when they're not on a cracked version of the game, and continue to support them in ways that you can't be with a pirate copy.

If you're a PC gamer, you're going to buy it. If you're a pirate then you're probably not going to buy the game anyway and you're not my market.

Do you feel competitive with Infinity Ward after the success of *Modern Warfare 2*?

I think the market is inherently competitive. Consumer expectations

are high, our expectations are high. We put pressure on ourselves to deliver the best quality of work that we can. As game developers we evaluate as we play and we play all sorts of games. Whether it's from within our franchise or outside I think there's something to be learned from all of them.

Expectations couldn't be higher for Call of Duty: Black Ops and that's fine – neither could ours.

#### The question that's on everyone's lips, will there be dedicated servers?

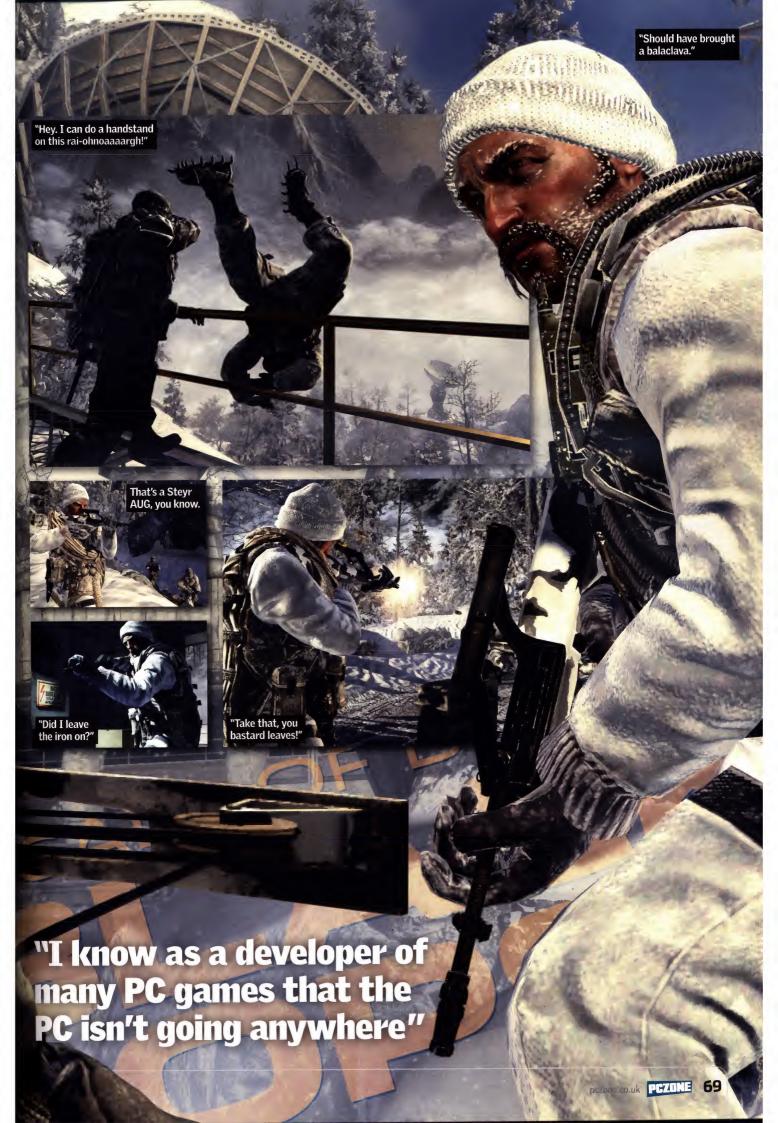
I think dedicated servers are excellent. I don't see any reason not to see them unless... well, I just don't see any reason not to. It seems like people like them and we're excited about what we're doing right now.

We very much support competitive play and clans, we want to make sure they have a great experience and we have a lot of people who like to run their own dedicated servers, a lot of people in our community who find that very important. We do work very hard to reconcile the desire to manipulate and modify those dedicated servers with offering them the persistent experience and benefits that the console system provides.

We're working very hard to marry those two things, so people can run dedicated servers and also participate in the more communal experience the console players get to have, given they're all on first-party servers.

One boom-boom bolt coming up.

68 PCZUNE PCONCO



#### **UPFRONTFIRSTLOOK**

## **POINT AND KILL**

A dissection of one of Black Ops' more chaotic levels..

#### **REAL TO THE LAST**

Treyarch researched and hired the actual gear worn by soldiers during the Cold War, and dressed models to scan with laser scanners for supreme realism.

## "Treyarch say they don't want to mess too much with the tried and tested Call of Duty formula'

with an Xbox 360 controller, but the helicopter was controlled much like a character in a normal FPS way.

On the PC we assume the controls will be kept just as basic: you'll steer/ aim with the mouse while using WASD to control speed and strafe, while the aircraft's altitude control is completely ignored. This means flying should be easy for anyone who's capable of playing an FPS. As Treyarch said: "This is not a flight sim."

That intense level concluded Treyarch's single-player showing off. But it's the multiplayer game that'll have most hooked in the first week of Black Ops' release. Treyarch said they'd be keeping its multiplayer game under wraps for now, but they shared more than a few hints of what to expect.

Black Ops' multiplayer gameplay is being taken incredibly seriously by Treyarch, who've put in twice as much time, resources and staff into making it

than World at War's. That's allowing for more time to be spent refining the experience. It's even leading the singleplayer campaign in some respects, says Treyarch. Some of the maps in the single-player game are based on multiplayer maps. Equally, the crossbow we described earlier was, among other things, made for the multiplayer game and brought across to the single-player.

The huge multiplayer team spent a lot of time thinking about the basics of multiplayer gaming and how to develop a better game. The three areas of focus were boiled down to the social,

**OFFENSIVE STUFF** This mission starts as the Tet Offensive got under way on 31 January, 1968. The

National Liberation Front (NLF aka the Viet Cong) and People's Army of Vietnam (NVA) got stuck into the Americans.

striking military and civilian centres throughout the south of the country

**DEMOLITION MEN** The occasional destructible building will make firing off hefty RPGs all the more satisfying, although don't expect to flatten entire levels. a la Bad Company 2.

#### competitive and players' experiences. **MULTIPLAYER TEASE**

On the player experience side Treyarch want to expand how a player customises the game to their own play style. That said, the team tells us they've done a significant amount of work on the create-a-class options to



allow a player to personalise their battle strategy. It's different enough for the developer to promise it'll be a "new experience" that leverages the freedom that real black ops soldiers have with choosing their gear.

Treyarch say they don't want to mess too much with the tried and tested COD formula on the competitive side of things, but rather just tweak it where possible. They promise more equipment players can take to the

battlefield and things that they can do to enhance their abilities against other players online, taking into consideration criticisms of previous COD games.

As for the social experience, Treyarch says they've had half of its development team focused on this, expanding the game with features that allow people to interact with others in and outside of the game. Maybe something like a stat-tracking website with forums and the like, we speculate.

This is all very vague but it paints the picture of a multiplayer mode that aims to be every bit as epic as thoseof the Modern Warfare games.

That's before we even get a hint as to what's in store for the four-player co-op mode, which was confirmed at the event but again kept completely shrouded in secrecy.

Call of Duty: Black Ops hopes to top this year's list of shooters - and it has every opportunity. Not only have the

previous two Modern Warfare games firmly established the Call of Duty franchise as the king of shooters, but with Modern Warfare 3 now on an indefinite hold thanks to Infinity Ward being in turmoil as its staff quit in droves (30 have left, at the time of printing) and sue Activision (to the frankly astounding tune of 'up to \$500,000,000'), this could be the time for Treyarch to step up and snatch Infinity Ward's crown.











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# Our verdict on the latest PC games

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#### **PCZONE** Baddes



#### (90%+)

Games scoring in this bracket are air-punching, heart-soaring triumphs Buy them.



#### RECOMMENDED

(75-89%) Head-turning, if not eye-popping, games. But then, who wants their eyes popped?



#### DUMP (0-19%)

PC ZONE's dirty protest. If a game is bad, we won't shirk our duty



#### ONLINE ONLY

Don't have an internet connection? Then don't waste your time with this game: it won't work without one



#### **EXPANSION PACK**

See this and you're going to have to get the original game first. We know, but life's not fair.



#### ON THE DVD

Good news! Check out the cover DVD for a playable demo or movie



#### **78 SPLINTER CELL:** CONVICTION

Once he was a cat-suited 40-something. Now he's a Chino-dressed 50-something. Does this mean Sam Fisher is less sneaky than creaky?



While it's not deep or clever, this is a brilliant example of a co-op shoot 'em up.

#### **83 BOB IN PIECES**

Another indie title bringing a physics spin on a classic genre: this time it's the turn of lander games.



#### **84 MOUNT&BLADE:** WARBAND

Take Mount&Blade, add royalty, North Africa and Islam, and you get this stand-alone expansion.

#### **85 MASS EFFECT 2:** KASUMI - STOLEN **MEMORIES**

Another mission for the brilliant Mass Effect 2, adds a new spin on the standard Shepard job.

#### **86 SAM & MAX SEASON 3 EPISODE 1:** THE PENAL ZONE

The dog and psychotic rabbitthing are back for another round of psychotic adventures. This time with added shine.



DA WARRENDSPRINGS

#### **87 WOODCUTTER SIMULATOR**

Probably the best lumberjack simulator ever made.

#### 88 LEAD & GOLD: GANGS OF THE OLD WEST

Team Fortress 2 goes cowboy.

#### **90 BEAT HAZARD**

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#### The **PCZONE** Machine

As you'll see on the many pages of resplendent reviews that follow, we list the minimum specifications you need to play each game in each review. Please refer to the publisher's website to check out their recommended optimum specs that'll make the games superwhizzy. We review all new games on a variety of systems, including our top-spec, very desirable Xworks X81-C17 (pictured right). For more info on Xworks, head down to the internet and type the following into your browser: xworksinteractive.com.



# **GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES** FROM LIBERTY CITY

Jon 'Log' Blyth indulges his leather biker loving side

**DEVELOPER** Rockstar **PUBLISHER** Rockstar WEBSITE rockstargames.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £24.99** 

#### AT A GLANCE...

Adds new colour and grit to Niko's Liberty City, but doesn't push the GTA envelope - it just stuffs more things into it.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

1.8GHz Core 2 Duo processor, 1.5GB RAM and a 256MB NVIDIA 7900 or ATI X1900 graphics card or better. Internet connection required for product activation.

#### **HOW IT STACKS**

FAR CRY 2 90%

NSIDE 2008'S RE-DRAWN and re-imagined Liberty City, Rockstar declined to change the shape, structure and content of the game, or even the average mission.

Niko Bellic's freedom to roam around the city was comfortably stifled by constant prompts telling him what to do next, whether it was getting in a car. following the mini-map, losing the cops, or shooting a man with an arrow floating above his head. Grand Theft Auto IV's sandbox element was mainly punching women's shopping out of their hands.

#### **BAD SHOOTING**

Gunplay was never the game's strongest card and GTA4's new cover mechanics did little to enhance it. Now, you just slog along the odd corridor with your back to the wall, instead of facing it.

Let's not be too down: it's important to remember what GTA does with majestic, and rarely equalled, excellence: tell stories in a way that makes you feel.

Take GTA4: Brucie was a charming mentalist, and the futility of his missions was a superbly deflating payoff. The constant pestering of your phone might have been frustrating, but it created bonds with certain characters that gave their eventual betrayal a genuine sting. The much-vaunted openness of Liberty City - and the dry and meaningless cliche that it was "living and breathing" - paled next to the lives of its mission-dispensing stars. They might not be sympathetic characters, but they're never boring, and they're dripping with satire that the tabloids never acknowledged.

With Rockstar's skilled writers providing redundant reams of character dialogue and satirical radio chat, Episodes From Liberty City develops the game's







## MULTIPLAYER We hunt in packs

The joyful stupidity of Grand Theft Auto 4's multiplayer is extended and embellished by the Episodes.

Lost and the Damned resurrects San Andreas' Gang Wars in Own The City, and introduces daft unbalanced racing combat in Chopper vs Chopper in which a helicopter takes on a pushbike. There's Road Rash-esque Race, which combines speed with baseball bats to opponents' heads.

Gay Tony doesn't bring so much new stuff to the party, but welcomes BASE jumping back from San Andreas.

GTA4 will always be a primarily single-player experience for most people, as the combat has never been the most compelling part of the game. But you should definitely poke your nose into the multiplayer side, because it's dumb, irresponsible fun.



strongest assets admirably - and even fixes one of the more tedious problems of GTA4 with mid-mission checkpoints. The release as two chapters that are playable independently of one other and GTA4, even makes sense of the game's bipolar attitude to gritty realism and OTT dickwaving. If you want real, get on your bike. If you want to jump out of a golden helicopter, go gay.

The Lost and the Damned drops you into the leathers of Johnny Klebitz, the second-in-command of The Lost, one of Liberty City's motorcycle gangs. He's been acting up while the proper boss, Billy, went through rehab. During this time, he negotiated a ceasefire with the rival gang and got the business side of the gang (selling drugs, naturally) sorted. Basically, he's greatly improved the

"Episodes develops the game's strongest assets" standard and expected life expectancy of the average gang member's life.

But this isn't a situation that pleases Billy when he returns. He doesn't own a Biker to Pussy translating dictionary, so he's not sure what "ceasefire" means. And he isn't prone to respecting the boundaries of his enemy's territory. So that's the journey you take on in *The Lost*: the role of the reasonable man forced to watch his hard work being undone by a stubborn old-timer with mental health issues. This tense relationship is so expertly written, and with such selfcontrol, that you'll wince at the constant anticipation of Lost-on-Lost violence that's being saved for the finale.

In terms of what you do in the world, few things change. You ride as part of a pack now, and riding over the icon that appears in the centre of the pack triggers bonus dialogue that you'd normally get from being in a car.

The pack mentality extends to your members - they're not a lot of nameless,

faceless people. If someone dies, they stay dead. If they're replaced, it'll be with less helpful rookies. Group AI and health is always something of an opaque art in GTA4 - it's difficult to tell what help your friends are actually offering, or what damage they're taking. You often suspect they're simply there to add to the spectacle, rather than the battle.

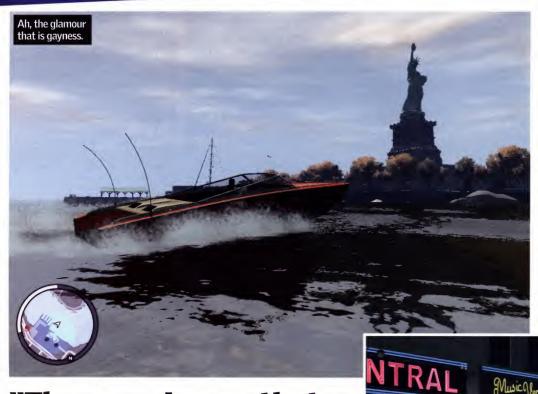
The poignant moment a soul leaves a ragdoll.

Beyond that (and the excellent handling on the bikes that undermines beefs about the GTA4 cars) this is classic DLC. More of the same, but with new characters that wouldn't fit into the main story. Rockstar aren't selling you the last level they didn't finish by deadline.

#### **SIR CAMPALOT**

The Ballad Of Gay Tony is a very different beast. When I say that, I don't mean it's a different game: you'll still be driving to waypoints, and you'll still have 25 side missions called Gang Wars. But the tone is bolder, the pace is faster, the music is camper, and

#### REVIEWS GRAND THEFT AUTO: EPISODES FROM LIBERTY CITY





Music Verue

"The same issues that were annoying in *GTA4* remain in the *Episodes*"









■ the characters are bigger. Gay Tony isn't even the star of the show, which shows considerable restraint: it'd be all to easy for Rockstar to pander to their target audience and turn him into a comedy flamer, so kudos for filling out his character. Admittedly, he's pill and coke-addled, a lousy businessman and no role model, but if you come to GTA for your role models, you need taking out of society right now.

Like its titular hero, The Ballad of Gay Tony is a tackier, unsubtle and more fun affair. You'll take down a helicopter with a rocket launcher in an introductory mission, and the parachutes are a flat rejection of The Lost's grenade-launching grittiness, in favour of a colourful Just Cause-style attitude to reality.

In a lovely touch, the relationship between player character Luis and Tony is one of genuine warmth. Luis' story is a new take on the GTA classic theme of a doomed new start - Tony sponsored Luis' release from jail and offered him a job. Of course, Luis is dragged back into his old ways - with a mother in debt to a loan shark, hopeless friends trying to carve themselves a drug empire, and a boss whose business methods involve selling his clubs simultaneously to two different (and equally violent) gangs. There's comedy here - for example, the escape from a golfing range in a caddy,

but it rarely comes from Tony or Luis. They're just friends in a world that tends to crazy levels of bat-shit.

#### SAME, BUT NEW

Gay Tony has a loveable, hypermanic comedy figure from the Brucie's school of self-regard - Yusuf Amir, voiced by Omid Djalili. He's the kind of guy that wants a subway train to boost his social standing, and Tony's the kind of guy who dangles bloggers from helicopters.

Between them, Luis is the classic bemused observer, helping out because he doesn't have a choice. And again, his is a story you'll care about, and it's pleasing

to see that the openly homophobic characters are also the least intelligent.

The same issues that were annoying in GTA4 remain present in the Episodes. The double sign-in to the Rockstar Social Club and Games for Windows - LIVE still feels needless, and despite some optimization since the first PC release, this is still a punishingly demanding game that'll swallow 17GB of hard disk and dip to ruinously stuttering frame rates if you're not on a relatively new PC.

Taking a corner is still frustrating on a keyboard - it's like trying to control a suitcase full of kangaroos with a bit of dowel rod. Combined with cover-andshoot segments of the game - clearly designed for consoles too - you might prefer to play this on a gamepad.

Episodes From Liberty City adds mature and expertly written stories and entertainingly unacceptable characters to the rapidly ageing Liberty City. They're punchier stories, and the imagination poured into GTA's restrictive framework manages, on many occasions, to break the monotony that set in towards the last third of Niko Bellic's journey. PCZ



have unique points. Find out which you must play first with this quiz:

#### When I'm not doing missions I like to:

- A Armwrestle.
- B Sex ladies in public toilets.
- C Walk into people and make them drop their shopping.

#### My favourite way to get around is a:

- A Road-hugging hog with a low centre of gravity.
- B Golden helicopter.
- C Any car that spins 720° if you so much as glance at the handbrake.

#### What really gets my goat is when:

- A Territorial infringements and disrespect damage your public perception.
- B Bloggers are bitchy about you.
- C Someone selling drugs on your turf, in a series of 25 bonus missions.

#### My favourite band is:

- A Motörhead.
- B Alcazar.
- C Gaye Bikers On Acid.

If you answered mostly (a) go for Lost And The Damned. Mostly (b) The Ballad Of Gay Tony is for you. If you answered mainly (c) then toss a coin - both games have got you covered.





GRAPHICS Great, if your PC can

SOUND New radio music and chat MULTIPLAYER More overblown GTA4 fun

- Enriches Liberty City
- Good hours per pound ratio
- Mid-mission checkpoints
- Missions still templated
- GTA play glitches remain





# SPLINTER CELL: CONVICTION

Steve Hogarty's last known location: Tesco Metro, Hackney

**DEVELOPER** Ubisoft Montreal **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft WEBSITE splintercell.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £39.99** 



#### AT A GLANCE...

Fisher, but with a Bourne twist. Find your kid, foil a terrorist plot, take cover and shoot multiple baddies at once in a really awesome way.

#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

1.8GHz Core Duo 2 processor, 1.5GB RAM (2GB Vista/7), 256MB NVIDIA 7800/ATI X1800 graphics card or better. Constant internet connection required for DRM.

#### **HOW IT STACKS**

**ERE COMES THE** usual, laborious, intro-spoiling caveat: if you don't have a perfectly reliable internet connection and an utterly dependable router (and you don't reside in a fictional world in which Ubisoft's authentication servers aren't under constant attack), there will be times when you won't be allowed to play Splinter Cell: Conviction using either its single-player or multiplayer modes.

Ubisoft's astounding anti-piracy measures will unfairly pull you back to the menu screen if there's even a whiff of your connection being lost. Mid-fight, mid-sneak, in the instant before Sam Fisher snaps a neck, the system will jerk you out of the action regardless - if only for a fraction of a second - to check that you haven't become the death of the industry incarnate since it last looked.

Not only do these interruptions stomp on the throat of immersion, the frequency of these split-second flits back to the menu screen increases if there's any other traffic on your network. Downloading the new Doctor Who from the BBC iPlayer? Streaming a live puppy

webcam? That'll impact how often you're rudely interrupted by a game-freezing "Attempting to re-establish connection" message. This player-punishing DRM is the latest in an embarrassing series of own goals for Ubisoft, which we've looked at in detail on page 30, but here in review-town you won't find it affecting Conviction's final score.

In fact, it'll hardly be mentioned again. Just imagine somebody flicking your ear after each page, then balance

the inconvenience of these infrequent interruptions against the number we've stamped at the end of these pages. It's a big one. It'll be a hard decision, so give it some thought.

#### **OLD GUY**

This isn't your father's Splinter Cell. Fisher's all grown up (the fiction glosses over it, but he should be in his mid-50s by this point), and the cruel passage of time has stolen from him his ability to zip up





#### REVIEWS SPLINTER CELL:





The AI is pleasingly unpredictable, with some guards more willing than others to chase you around blind corners. They vocalise every thought too, an angry deluge of anti-Fisher sentiment tumbling from the mouths of any

most of their attention, affording you an opportunity to circle around into a more advantageous position. Here, the guards' AI works almost perfectly, striking a crucial balance: dumb enough to stride purposefully towards where they think you are, but clever enough to consider where you might've gone. If you were last seen diving into a drain, they'll fire wildly into the darkness below rather than potter mindlessly about its edge.

From your new vantage point you can either carry out a random, gruesome melee attack on an enemy - Fisher can do this move where he seems to stab people with bullets, using his pistol like a deadly and impractical staple gun - or take a distracted guard hostage (which



and bagging the ne'er-do-wells.

#### SHOOTY STEALTHY

There's little sense of accomplishment in merely sneaking past every guard undetected, Conviction simply isn't geared towards pure stealth. Neither is the plot: an off-the-grid Fisher's got word that his daughter, who he believed had been killed in a hit-and-run (back in Splinter Cell: Double Agent) is alive and well, leading him to charge angrily through a conspiracy plot in search of the truth. Only on one occasion are you limited by a mission-resetting "don't set off an alarm" order, otherwise you're free to be as loud as you like.

Shotguns, submachine guns, grenades and assault rifles are all options available to you. Every gun can be used in an execution too - with shotgun executions being a particularly destructive way to neutralise a room of opposition. Fisher's grumpy new demeanour doesn't lend itself to the witty guard encounters of old Splinter Cells either, a massive shame



as it makes the whole of the single-player campaign come across more than a bit po-faced - a waste of good Ironside. What his temperament provides instead are wonderfully violent interrogations, vaguely quick-time event-style expositions during which you can smash your victim's head against "contextual bash points" (see Interrogatored).

Conviction's single-player game is very short too – roughly five hours long depending on how you play - but it's backed by the incredible co-op mode. This is a lengthy and entirely original

#### "Conviction simply isn't geared towards pure stealth"

buggers who know vou're skulking around. You are, after all, infamous.

Present yourself to guards and they'll engage you, but duck back into the darkness or behind cover and you trigger Conviction's second party trick. Your lastknown location is marked by a ghostly silhouette to which enemies will pay

also allows you to use your execute ability). Or you can pop heads the old fashioned way. Unlike the previous games' deliberately wonky guns, your basic weapons are mostly accurate in Conviction, though it's this needless expenditure of energy that Fisher tuts at after an encounter. He, along with the

#### INTERROGATORED

The many, many terrible things Sam Fisher does to people who don't answer his questions...



WINDOWFD EST. DAMAGES: £315

This man has his head punched through a window early on, when he failed to name the capital of Argentina.



PIANOED

EST. DAMAGES: £6,000

This man couldn't tell Sam Fisher the name of the song he was humming, and had his face smashed into an expensive grand piano.



MIXING DESKED

EST. DAMAGES: £700

The man could only name 41 presidents of the United States. Was body slammed into a mixing desk, to his eternal shame.



EST. DAMAGES: £1,200

This man wasn't sure what he wanted for dinner, and soon found himself shoved rudely into a large, wall-mounted HDTV.



campaign built from the ground up and starring two fresh characters. Kestrel, the distrusting Russian, and Archer the wise-cracking American.

The co-op side of *Conviction* is a game in itself, with a plot that sets up the events of the main campaign. Mark and execute works for both players, with each spy's marks appearing on the other's HUD. In this way, up to eight enemies can be marked, and with the right co-ordination kills can be carried out simultaneously.

#### **DUAL FISHERS**

The effect of the co-op campaign being designed purely from the perspective of two players is apparent, if only in the frequent ability of one spy to worm around inside a ceiling crawlspace while the other moves along the corridor underneath, taking advantage of the marks being given to him from above. You can be grabbed by an enemy too, at which point your buddy has to take a risky shot or flank the grabby guard to take him out from

STABBED INTO A TREE **EST. DAMAGES: COVERED BY NHS** This man failed to explain to Sam's satisfaction Fermat's Theorum and was subsequently stabbed right into a tree.



behind - an act that pushes all sorts of lovely co-op empathy buttons.

Supplementing the co-op love-in, Deniable Ops is a series of stand-alone missions which ostensibly replace the old Mercs vs Spy competitive multiplayer element. These see the two spies luring guards towards one another by making rude noises behind crates. Other Deniable Ops missions see the pair co-operating to

Kestrel: one half

of the co-op team.

fight against waves of increasingly harder enemies.

All of this carrying on feeds into the game's economy system. In-game achievements dole out upgrade points, which you can then spend on weapons mid-campaign, increasing their accuracy, damage, and the number of enemies they can mark at any one time. It's a slightly underused feature, given that you'll fall back on one silenced, infinite-ammo

> pistol in particular, almost entirely avoiding the big noisemakers in the second drawer, but the drip-feed of progression is always a welcome one, as is any incentive to experiment with patrolling guards.

Conviction's a bold re-invention for the series then, just as it had always promised to be. The powerful

Bauer's-own brand of actionstealth means it's unfair on most levels to compare it to the likes of Chaos Theory, and though delayed by almost three years it still feels stylistically relevant - who could've guessed that looking undaunted and firing a gun sideways would still be cool in 2010? The projected objectives are incredibly flashy too, a remnant of a brief infatuation certain quarters of the

internet had with videos of hi-def

projectors, one that never went viral but

remains in tune with Conviction's austere and polished tech-politic mix-bag.

Keeping it from a higher score is that stumpy campaign length, and the rapidly degenerating level design as the game draws to a close, which sees large, multiple-pathed and accessible rooms whittled down to enemy-funnelling corridors, drawing to the fore the few negative aspects of *Conviction*'s combat (here, niggles like the alternating run/ walk mode bound to the Shift key begin to irritate). And redressing those concerns is the astonishingly fun multiplayer component, and the thrill of efficient murder within the highly refined and endlessly enjoyable mark and execute system. Sam might not be sticking to the shadows as much as he once dide, but Splinter Cell's never been this classy. PEZ



GRAPHICS Bit too grey at times **SOUND** Lots of sweary guards MULTIPLAYER Fabbo co-op

- **Executions satisfying**
- Stylish and polished
- Needlessly brilliant co-op
- Single-player a bit short
- Loses pace near the end



#### REVIEWSPLAINSIGHT









# LAIN SIGHT

#### Jon 'Log' Blyth had his eyes on the prize, but it moved

**DEVELOPER** Beatnik Games PUBLISHER Steam, D2D, Gamers Gate **WEBSITE** plainsightgame.com **ETA** Out now PRICE \$10



#### AT A GLANCE...

An eye-warping robot-boosting melee deathmatch in which you bank your points by committing suicide.

#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2Ghz processor, 1Gb RAM, and a DirectX 9 graphics card with Shader Model 2 support. You'll need a sound card for sounds, too. Fancy.

#### HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2 93% UNREAL TOURNAMENT 3 PLAIN SIGHT 90%

OR REASONS BEST known to themselves the sword-waving robots of whatever world Plain Sight is set in are locked in a perpetual deathmatch.

It seems they kill each other, because killing each other gives them energy and makes them bigger. As you grow bigger, the energy reward for killing you is greater. So, it's a matter of storing as much energy, and as big a multiplier, as you can before you bottle it. When you're a big enough target that everyone's after your energy, it's time to commit explosive suicide.

Suicide cashes in your energy points, along with any multiplier you've picked up from chain kills, and another multiplier for any enemies who got destroyed by your nuclear seppuku. Banking your points lets you upgrade your tin fella - adding shields, speed, a warning indicator that tells you when someone's locked on, and various other



bonuses, such as reducing the time taken to detonate (during which you're completely prone).

#### **SUICIDE IS HILARIOUS**

So far, so conkers. But Plain Sight is set over a number of retro 3D maps which work like Mario Galaxy spheres. You attack another player by locking on, constantly running, jumping, and swirling your mouse, and holding down the left button to lock on and build up a charge. Once the orange reticules align and turn red, you're in with a chance release the mouse button to launch vourself into a lethal boost. Assuming they haven't disappeared halfway around the planet by the time you let go.

A helpful touch is the trails players leave. Colour-coded by the energy level of their owner, they give you a sense of direction and purpose in a world that would be blank and baffling otherwise.

Five modes mix up the gameplay from classic deathmatch, to causing the biggest explosion, to Ninja! Ninja! Ninja! Robozilla!, in which you take it in turns to wreak as much carnage as possible before the other players whittle your health away.

Practice mode is good for teaching yourself the basics, against some competent but unchallenging AI.

It's online where you'll get your skills flexed, your wrists tested, and your inner ears screwed with. It's frantic, non-stop action that leaves you with the perfect combination of exhilaration, satisfaction and a nugget of injustice that makes you want to play again.

Plain Sight is a simple little game that's polished and varied enough to compete with the big boys in terms of pure, joyful fun. **PEZ** 

**GRAPHICS** Simple, effective SOUND Charming music and then booms

**MULTIPLAYER** Five modes

- Simple, pure fun
- Satisfying suicide mechanic
- Frustrating in a good way
- Clean, accessible chaos
- Everyone is better than me



# 2×01/05 They've got an ice level! **BOB CAME IN PIECES** Shoot to Phil? No?

**DEVELOPER** Ludosity Interactive **PUBLISHER** Ludosity Interactive WEBSITE ludosity.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £6.49** 

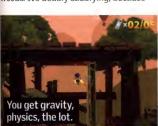
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

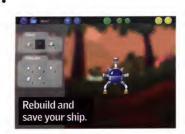
2.4GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB video card.

HERE'S SOMETHING **CHARMING** about Bob. His quest to get back to his job in an intergalactic call centre is an unexpected mix of Moon Lander and Spore Creature Creator, held together with the unpredictable glue of physics.

When you start, it's a basic matter of boosting yourself around a corridor. And you needn't worry about the delicate tip-tapping of traditional lander games, as your ship is indestructible. It can get trapped in clumsy situations, but you're free to reset to checkpoints at any time.

Where Bob Came... develops into something distinctive and worthwhile, is in the ship parts you find around the maps. They can be snapped onto your ship at the many screwdriver icons, along with boosters and pushy-pully gadgets that you find along the way. You'll be regularly rebuilding your ship to suit the needs of a level - poking a pipe through a gap in the wall, putting a booster on top to burn away some weeds. It's doubly satisfying, because







there are clumsy and elegant ways to complete a level. A poorly optimised load-out might work, but you'll make your life a lot easier if you balance your ship. Asymmetrical crafts are a bastard to control, especially when you're carrying some cargo.

The music and sound effects become slightly abrasive after a while, but there's no essential noises you need to hear, so just turn them off and sing your favourite songs. You'll get a few hours of intriguing and fresh puzzling for your six quid and singing's fun too.

Jon 'Log' Blyth



#### YOUR WEAPON..



WWW.ALPHAPROTOCOL.COM







# MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND

#### Nick Brakespear gets confused and mounts his blade

**DEVELOPER** TaleWorlds **PUBLISHER** Paradox Interactive WEBSITE taleworlds.com **ETA** Out now **PRICE £24.99** 

F MY CHILDHOOD experiences of medieval re-enactment are anything to go by, then medieval warfare smelled rather strongly of blood, sweat and WD-40, Strongbow was the favoured drink in those ancient times, and banquets usually involved curry and chips.

For all its fancy new additions to Mount&Blade, this standalone expansion spectacularly fails to grasp the historical significance of the Indian takeaway. Given its accuracy in other areas however, we'll forgive this error.

For those of you new to the scene, Mount&Blade loiters between Sacrifice and Medieval: Total War in terms of gameplay. Set in the fictional 13th century war-torn land of Calradia, the franchise offers a blend of open-ended RPG. RTS and mounted combat, with real-time battles and realistic physics.

Veterans of the original release who saw TaleWorld's claims that this is a sequel will be dismayed to hear that Warband has the same setting, the same kingdoms and much of the same content as Mount&Blade. Considering this is a standalone release with a

standalone price this may put you off, but Warband does introduce some improvements and additional features to Mount&Blade.

#### **MANY MOUNTS**

Top of this list is the new multiplayer side to the game. Offering seven game modes, randomly generated map options and bots to fill ranks in smaller matches, there's little to find fault here. The RPG elements of the single-player version are cast aside in favour of a class system, neatly avoiding issues of character balance, and equipment is purchased with money rewarded for kills. Sadly, there's no campaign or co-op mode, but with so many conventional multiplayer options and an active modding community, it's hard to bear a grudge.

On the single-player front, players can now find a spouse and engage in a lengthy courting process in the name of love or power. This can lead to control of a faction, becoming a king, and special party members being promoted by you to become vassals lords and given land. Meanwhile a new faction and a desert



region based on medieval Islamic society has appeared, offering new armour and clothing designs, and a more topical locale for waging war.

And of course, there's the kick button to play with. You'll be having Duke Nukem flashbacks and shouting "I've got balls of steel" in no time.



**GRAPHICS** Moments of beauty **SOUND** Thundering hooves **MULTIPLAYER** Fully functional

- Multiplayer with horses
- More power
- The kick button
- No new campaign
- No co-op multiplayer



#### AT A GLANCE...

Historical action RPG with RTS elements and lots of horses.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2.1GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

#### HOW IT STACKS

MOUNT&BLADE 62%



IS CHOICE...

**MASS EFFECT 2:** KASUMI – STOLEN MEMORIES She took my... thingy

**DEVELOPER** BioWare **PUBLISHER** EA **WEBSITE** masseffect.com **ETA** Out now

PRICE 560 BioWare points (approx £4.33)



1.8GHz Intel Core 2 Duo processor, 1GB RAM (2GB for Vista/7) and a 256 MB graphics card with Pixel Shader 3.0 support. Mass Effect 2 required. Constant internet connection required to play ME2 DLC.

UY, DOWNLOAD, AND install Kasumi, and you'd be forgiven for thinking it didn't work. The only evidence of your purchase is an email on your terminal and a waypoint on your galaxy map, reading "Recruit The Master Thief".

So you return to Citadel and Kasumi \* tracks you down quickly - in a stupidly conspicuous, but forgivably fun, way that sets the tone of the mission. And it's a strange old task. BioWare have squeezed a heist into the Mass Effect game style with considerable skill, but it's still a difficult to buy into completely. You're at a party of the world's most decadent and criminal billionaires, running around saying "let me into the boss' bedroom please".

Kasumi is a good character – a cocky but heartbroken thief who can't let go of





her past. She could have been a great character in the main game, but you only get one mission with her for your money (OK, points). She's immediately loyal, so there's no revealing second mission to make it worth buttering her up. Indeed, if you've already completed the game, you're missing out on the pleasure of having her skills with you throughout the story.

So, what do you get for your quids? A new character (briefly) with unique stalking backstab attacks and flashbang grenades; a 60-minute mission (tops); and a submachine gun. Stolen Memories is definitely not big on value, but if you're a Mass Effect fan you'll find it hard to resist. Which is, obviously, what EA are counting on.

Jon 'Log' Blyth





WWW.ALPHAPROTOCOL.COM



# **SAM & MAX SEASON 3** EPISODE 1: THE PENAL ZONE

David Brown wishes he harassed pigeons for a living

**DEVELOPER** Telltale Games **PUBLISHER** Telltale Games WEBSITE telltalegames.com/ samandmax **ETA** Out now **PRICE £24.99** (five-episode season)

**ND SO ANOTHER** season swoops down from Telltale Castle and begins to suckle on your adventure gaming teat, this time returning to the corners of Straight and Narrow for another battle with the forces of bizarre evil.

Sam and Max are back after a substantial time away and it seems they mean business this time. Telltale have kept up a consistent level of quality with their games, always scoring around the 70 to 80% marks. You've pretty much always known what you were going to get, but this time things are just that little bit different. For a start, it's safe to say this is the best they've ever made.

The writing is always witty and much more amusing than in any of their previous titles, with some genuinely



laugh-out-loud moments in there. The voice acting is a cut above, especially compared to the embarrassing incidental pirates in Tales of Monkey Island. There isn't a single character that you don't want to fully listen to and at no point does the dialogue have you reaching for the skip button.

#### **RETURN TO FORM**

With the humour nailed on, including self-referential comments about how the series' comedy can be baffling to non-converts, the puzzles are next under the magnifying glass.

Adventure veterans will bemoan the lack of mind-bending puzzles and that's a problem. The introduction of Max's psychic powers, especially the one which lets him predict the future, is often akin to Telltale telling you how to solve the puzzle. It's not as simple as that and it does help to push you along at a steady pace, but it definitely doesn't make this a challenge. That's a good thing though, if you just want to relax and play through a madcap story about alien gorillas, brains in jars and toys that grant very specific powers to the user.

Aside then from a questionable difficulty level, and therefore a relatively short lifespan, there's not much at all wrong with Penal Zone. It's funny, clever and thoroughly enjoyable to play, and you can't ask for much more than that can you?

**GRAPHICS** Telltale's best yet SOUND Voices are a joy MULTIPLAYER One-player co-op

- Telltale's best to date
- Superb dialogue
- Excellent voice acting
- Good new characters...
- ...and plenty of old
- references
- Puzzles a bit too easy



#### AT A GLANCE...

The zany freelance police return for their third set of twisted adventures. mixing intergalactic monkeys in with curious psychic powers.

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2GHz processor, 1GB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

**HOW IT STACKS** 

# YOUR WEAPON IS CHOICE...



WOODCUTTER SIMULATOR Lumberjack Squat

DEVELOPER It's a mystery PUBLISHER Layernet WEBSITE Oh, if only ETA Out now PRICE £1799

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

1.5GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 128MB graphics card.

**OU'RE EXPECTING A** comedy review, right? Well, I'm not taking the easy road. I'm going to sit here and play this game until I've at least finished the first mission, the Melleroy Job. There's no manual, but I've watched a couple of episodes of *Ax Men*, so I'm as qualified as anyone to do this.

Having pressed every button on the keyboard, I've discovered pressing 'H' brings up a little fact sheet. A fact sheet that tells me precisely what I'd figured out and no more. So the question still remains: How. Do. I. Cut. Down. A. Fucking. Tree?

Basically, this is a game which tells you you're "not in the right position". I have spent two hours circling this tree, trying to make sense of that blip on the radar, watching YouTube videos of a Polish guy jabber on in what are probably perfectly good sentences where he comes from, and I still can't get this machine to work.



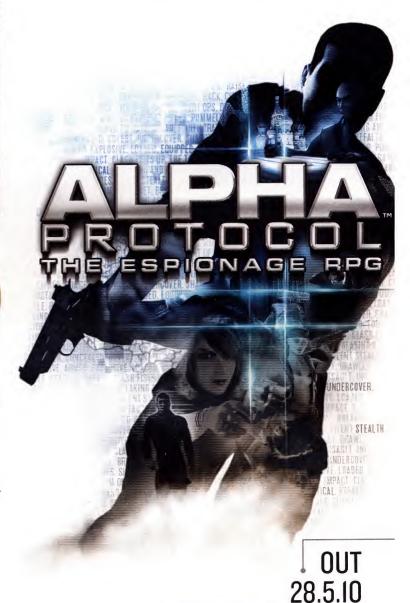
There's something deeply wrong when a simulator doesn't let you make a mistake. What flight simulator doesn't let you crash into the sea? What *Lipstick Tycoon* game doesn't let you price yourself out of the lipstick market? A huge part of *Woodcutter Simulator* should be bad judgments and carnage. People don't watch *Ax Men* and its ilk because they like to watch large trees fall to the ground: they want to see arms get ripped off.

With games that live in a pointless niche as this, it's always good to hear from people why they like it, so here is Andrew Bryant's (@optimaximal) explanation of why he pretends to be a woodcutter: "I play and/or like it because nothing captures the highoctane lifestyle of a holzfäller like it. I also like the twig cursor."

See? Even your fan can't justify you, you stupid gamebollock.

Jon 'Log' Blyth











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# **ONLINE** LEAD AND GOLD: GANGS OF THE WILD WEST

David Brown saddles up and heads out into review country

**DEVELOPER** Fatshark **PUBLISHER** Paradox Interactive WEBSITE fatshark.se **ETA** Out now PRICE £9.99

#### AT A GLANCE...

Small-scale multiplayer shoot outs in a cartoon version of the Wild West, with added gunpowder kegs.

#### MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS:

2.4GHz processor (2GHz Vista), 1.5GB RAM (2GB Vista), 512MB graphics card with Shader Model 3.0 compatibility. Steam required.

#### HOW IT STACKS

TEAM FORTRESS 2 93%

LEAD AND GOLD 71%

**AVING THE ABILITY** to shoot hats off in a game is a great thing, especially when this act is accompanied by that distinctive shrieking sound guns made in the Wild West. Each of the four classes in Lead and Gold has headwear you can blast off, exposing their craniums to the world. Do this to a Gunslinger and you even notice he's comically bald, reducing the fear factor of meeting one up close and personal in a dark alley.

LAG (an appropriate acronym) is a Team Fortress 2-inspired multiplayer shooter. As either a Blue or a Red gang member, you'll take the battlefield in a number of different game modes. Some involve blowing up objectives and taking items like sacks of gold back to your base, while others just require you to kill more enemies than the opposition or capture five different zones of control.

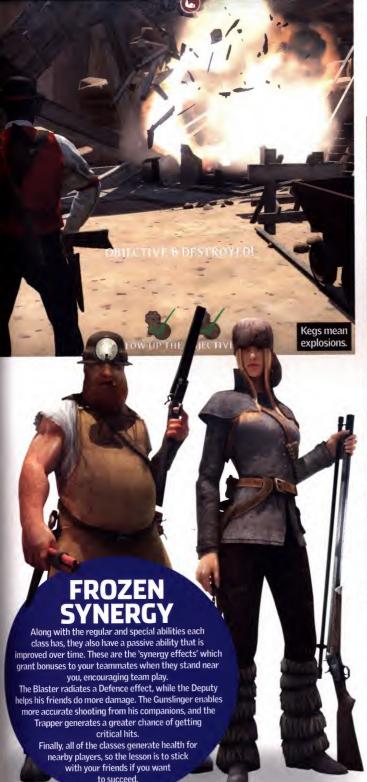
The four classes are Gunslinger, Trapper, Blaster and Deputy, with the former being probably the easiest to get to grips with. Each character has a special ability, with the Gunslinger able to fire off six shots very quickly to take out opponents from close range. The Blaster can lob sticks of dynamite and wields a double-barrelled shotgun, while the Trapper can place bear traps to ensnare unwitting enemies. Lastly, the Deputy's special ability allows him to tag an opponent, so his whole team can observe their movements.

#### A TRUE TEAM

In terms of balance, each character trades off well against the others. At no point do you feel useless, even when playing as a long-range class (Deputy or Trapper) on a particularly boxed-in level like Devil's Pit. Clearly certain classes will have advantages at times, but on the whole developers Fatshark have done a superb job keeping play interesting for all players at all times.

The only real problem with the characters is that there's a distinct lack of personality, as none of them have any vocalisations or taunts. This means you don't get attached to them in the way





Tag! You're it!



to see the match transferred to a new host, such as with Modern Warfare 2.

Some more effective team balancing wouldn't go amiss either, with games sometimes descending into farce when a few players from a team decide to leave mid-game. As an example, it's not unheard of to discover you and your teammates don't have any opponents to fight until the end of the round, when one player might get switched to the opposing team. One of the perils of limiting your numbers to five-a-side is that when players drop out, the effect is far more noticeable.

#### **PATCH QUICKLY**

All these issues are with the framework rather than the action and, with a bit of work, could be sorted out in subsequent patches. But in terms of what's on offer it's not possible to glowingly recommend Lead and Gold.

now, even at the very good price of £9.99,

you would to a sandvich-chomping Heavy in TF2.

LAG's also a game that doesn't take itself too seriously and therefore isn't one that's likely to get on your wick as much as serious multiplayer shooters like Bad Company 2 or Counter-Strike. Because the game is only five-a-side, you always feel like you have something to contribute to the team, be it with supporting actions, like tagging opponents or just laying traps around the gold to stop the bastards stealing it.

Playing this game isn't all wine and roses, though. Player numbers are limited and the lack of dedicated servers is a real problem. In fact, it's the biggest problem

affecting the game, by far with serious lag issues in pretty much every game you join. This seems down to the servers being based in the US, which leads to pings of around the 400ms mark being possible. It's a problem that must be sorted out by Fatshark if they want LAG to survive and hopefully, when you will have read this, they'll have taken action.

Another flaw is that the game ends if the host disconnects, as there's no facility

"While its substance is wholesome and good, the server situation at the moment simply won't do"

While its substance is wholesome and good, even with a slight lack of long-term appeal, the server situation at the moment simply won't do. If this isn't a relevant criticism any more, by all means cut out the score with a pair of scissors and sew in a new one with at least five more points added on.

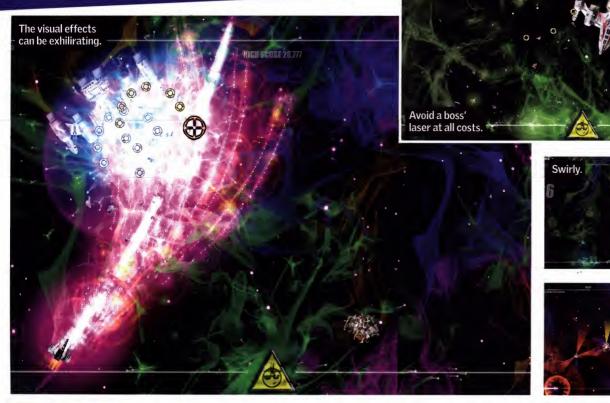
Horses would've been good too.

GRAPHICS Cartoon TF2-style SOUND Sad, mute characters **MULTIPLAYER** Only way to play

- Chean
- ✓ Well-balanced classes
- Everyone contributes
- Lots of potential
- Lag and server issues
- Slight lack of long-term depth



#### REVIEWSBEATHAZARD



# BEAT HAZAR

#### David Brown is a hazard to himself and everyone around him

**DEVELOPER** Cold Beam Games **PUBLISHER** Cold Beam Games WEBSITE coldbeamgames.com **ETA** Out now PRICE £6.99

**HE FIRST QUESTION** you want to ask yourself before starting up Beat Hazard is "Do I suffer from epilepsy?" If so, it might even be dangerous to look at the grabs on this page, such are the level of strobes and visual embellishments.

Rising to extraordinary levels on the higher difficulty settings, it's almost impossible to tell where your ship is, such is the carnage. That's also when the game is at its best, throwing tons of enemies, asteroids, power-ups and big boss ships at you as your song reaches its crescendo.

Like Audiosurf (87%, issue 193) Beat Hazard takes a track from your digital music collection - thought not M4A files, so be warned - and produces a game level from it. Unlike Audiosurf, though, there's no real difference between them, other than maybe some more aggressive flashing lights for faster songs and fewer during softer ballads and Brian Eno soundscapes.

The difficulty level is also altered depending on the brutality of your chosen song. Pick a Deicide song and the ruthless drumming will make your game incredibly intense, but stick a Bob Dylan strum-a-long on and you'll be able to breeze it, even on harder settings.

The premise of the gameplay is basic Asteroids fare, which, even after all these years, is still simple yet fiendishly addictive, so the idea to combine that with your own music is inspired. Using the keys to move your ship about while aiming a separate reticule with your mouse, it feels fluid and easy to play with a deal of sophistication.

The graphics are superbly colourful and exciting too, with explosions, debris and lasers constantly lighting up the screen, sometimes to the point where you have absolutely no idea where your ship is or if he's (or she's) in mortal peril, especially when playing a speed metal track. However, the love-in ends there. because there's just not enough to it.

#### **ROCK OUT IN SPACE**

There are two modes: Play, where you pick a track and attempt to survive until it ends, and Survival, where you do play through one song and the entire album it comes off. Sadly, that's all there is to Beat Hazard, apart from earning Steam achievements, levelling up to earn bonuses when you play, and getting on the online leaderboards.

The lack of gameplay options is a shame and the hope is the developers will continue to support it with new

material. With new modes and more variety to the core experience, there's no reason this couldn't attain the level of adoration enjoyed by Audiosurf. Beat Hazard is cheap, but for now there's not enough reason to come back after the initial wow factor from the visuals wears off.

A sedate moment.

GRAPHICS Vivid, colourful SOUND Your own music **MULTIPLAYER** Online leaderboards is your lot

- Creates levels based on vour music
- Luscious visuals
- Fast music = intense levels
- Not enough game modes
- Initial impact factor wears off quickly
- Can't use your M4A files



#### AT A GLANCE...

Asteroids clone that uses your music collection to generate visually lush levels full of enemies and carnage

MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: 2GHz processor, 512MB RAM, and a 256MB graphics card.

HOW IT STACKS

AUDIOSURF 78%

BEAT HAZARD 69%



VOTE NOW AT GOLDENJOYSTICK.COM

# Budget

Old, battered and weather-beaten, *David Brown* is perfect for this job

OUTCAST

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$9.99 (£6.50)

HERE ARE CERTAIN older games out there that have been lost in the mists of time due to the constant advance of technology making them impossible to play. Outcast was one of those, denied to a generation of new users because certain bits ran too quickly, making them impossible to complete.



Now, thanks to Good Old Games, the 1999 "stranded on a parallel alien world, stop evil, be messiah" classic is available for us all to devour anew. The graphics engine is looking a bit ropey now, as you'd expect, but a lot of the bugs and issues that were prevalent way back when are no longer relevant, meaning the slew of interesting ideas, like the saved game system that can alert nearby enemies to your presence, shine through.

The combat is a let down, lacking the substance necessary to match up to the depth of the rest of the game, so it's advisable to err on the side of diplomacy and tact when talking with the natives youmeet. Their AI is still remarkable, even to this day, putting to shame a lot of modern efforts.



"Don't call me 'Geordi' OK?"



This is a game you probably never played, so now is the perfect time to pick up a cheap copy from GOG. It's not as impressive as it once used to be, but that doesn't stop it being a fine romp through a fascinating alien world.







Steve refused to leave the office for days. SAVING £50 on tube fares

David lifted CDs from Metal Hammer's desks. SAVING £200 on earbleeding music



Log became a fan of grey squirrel: roasted and in pies SAVING £100 in

## **CALL TO POWER II**

PUBLISHER Good Old Games WEBSITE gog.com PRICE \$5.99 (£3.90)

**RECENTLY POPPING UP on Good** Old Games (gog.com), this classic of the epic turn-based strategy genre was released by Activision as a sequel to the Civilization: Call to Power.

The confusion lies in copyrights, haggling over names and other such shenanigans. It's best not to worry about it. This one differed from CTP in that its interface and numerous balancing issues regarding economies and combat were improved.

While the vanilla version of CTP2 from GOG is a reasonable Civ-style



game, if you purchase it you should go to Apolyton (apolyton.net/ctp2) and download their CTP2 expansion mod Apolyton Edition. This site is home to a fanatically dedicated crew who've spent seven years improving, tweaking and creating additions to all of the Civ and Call to Power games.

Their CTP2 mod is based on the game's original source code that was released to the general public by Activision in 2003. Apolyton Edition massively expands on what you were originally able to do and is a must-get

download for owners of the game.

## **SHELLSHOCK 2:** RI OOD TRAILS

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE sold-out.co.uk PRICE £9.99

THEY SAY THAT shite always rises to the top, but fortunately this particular pile of that particular substance managed to stay plastered to the bottom of the gaming barrel.



Produced by a now defunct arm of Rebellion, Shellshock 2 was an FPS with nothing to recommend it. The graphics are beyond awful, the sound was uninspiring and the combat was tremendously unexciting, with huge iron sights that obscured the screen and a selection of weapons that were anything but accurate.

Moreover, the attempts to introduce a potentially traumatic story about soldiers being used as subjects for psychological experimentations were haphazard and clumsy.



In fairness, Shellshock 2 hasn't really got any worse with age, but that's because it's was atrocious to start with. In fact, there is one particular thing that raises it up very slightly in the grand scheme of things. Consider that the next game the studio produced was Rogue Warrior (issue 217, 14%), So Shellshock

2 has the honour of being better than Rogue Warrior. Let that be a warning to you, should you think of buying this game.



# PCZONE BUDGET GAMES



#### **MEDIEVAL II:** TOTAL WAR

£10. White Label The historical RTS game that set the standard for others to follow.

Buy it, if only to try out the mods.



#### THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: **OBLIVION GOTY**

£14.99. Steam

The sequel to Morrowind features the massive open-world gameplay expected from Elder Scrolls games.



#### **COMPANY OF HEROES**

£9.99, Steam

A challenging yet fun, WWII RTS that sees you playing Axis and Allies in the days after D-Day.



#### **PSYCHONAUTS**

£10. Steam

You won't have more fun than this psychological platformer unless Brütal Legend appears on the PC.



#### **MASS EFFECT**

The definitive space opera RPG/ shooter. A must-play, especially before you start Mass Effect 2.

## **CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 2008**

PUBLISHER Mastertronic WEBSITE sold-out.co.uk PRICE £9.99

**PEOPLE QUESTION THE need for** football management games at the best of times, so the decision to re-release old ones has always been puzzling, especially when it's the rubbish Champ Man 2008.



The latest - and perhaps the last -Champ Man saw Beautiful Game Studios clawing back a substantial degree of respectability after years of producing garbage products, so there's absolutely no reason to buy this one.



The database is old and pretty much everything about the package - match engine, transfer market, tactics system et al - has been massively improved upon in CM2010 and every Football Manager game from the past few years.

As football enthusiasts will already have a copy of a Football Manager - any recent vintage of which shame this game - and those who are into FIFA Manager or the Championship Manager series will either already have an old one, or won't be interested this release because it's out of date. And nonfootball management fans won't want it for the obvious reasons.

As such, this can't be recommended to anyone, even those who are stuck in

a time warp and can't accept that Manchester City are now a good team. Interesting as a museum piece only



#### AND THE REST...

Three dirt-cheap golden nuggets you should definitely own



SNIPER ELITE: **BERLIN 1945** \$9.99 (£6.50), Good Old Games An interesting idea let down by sloppy execution.



**PHANTASMAGORIA 2** \$5.99 (£3.60), Good Old Games An example of a seguel can make a vilified and laughed-at original much, much worse.



**BETRAYAL AT KRONDOR** \$5.99 (£3.60), Good Old Games This ancient RPG hasn't aged much. A lot of material to get stuck into here.

# ver's Guide

Don't stop buying them until they're bought

#### PCZ TOP 5 PAIN-IN-THE-REAR DRM

- UBISOFT UPLAY No internet, no play. French gits.
- SECUROM Hides in your PC forever and ever.
- PROTECTION TECHNOLOGY'S STARFORCE

Knackers your PC. Allegedly.

**TAGÈS SA'S** TAGÈS Really easy to crack.

PHOTOCOPY-**PROOF CODE** SHEETS

Famously uncrackable.

**BUMS IN GAME NAMES** 

'ASS' 'ASS' IN'S CREED II Issue 219, 90%

PCZ TOP 5

COMMANDOS:

**ENEMY LINES** Issue 66, 87% TOP 'TRUMPS': DOCTOR WHO Issue 196, 40%

'BEHIND'

**BIONIC** COMMANDO 'REAR'MED

#### **FPS**



HALF-LIFE 2 + EPISODES PCZ Issues: 148 (97%), 170 (91%), 187 (82%)

Excelling in terms of action, storyline, emotion and ingenious set pieces, the continuing adventures of Gordon Freeman have yet to be equalled. Yes, a moderate amount of the action has faded through repetition by the time the episodes kick in, but with its Combine-defying freedom fighting, this is still the most finely crafted shooter experience ever released on PC. Gordon's alive, and long may he remain so.



**LEFT 4 DEAD** 

PCZ Issue: 202 - 93% The only thing the we like more the only thing the we like more than killing zombies is killing zombies as a team. And that's what *L4D* provides; a chance to scream with your buddies as you kill endless amounts of mindless and murderous plague victims.



**TEAM FORTRESS 2** 

PCZ Issue: 187 - 93% Beautifully balanced and Beautifully balanced and engaging, Valve's update of the classic mod is a triumph, bringing together the best of online shooters and topping it all off with superb animation that rivals the best Pixar's films.



LEFT 4 DEAD 2

PCZ Issue: 214 - 94% Basically, this is Left 4 Dead in the Deep South. Except this one has new modes, new Infected, new campaigns, as well as machettes and chainsaws for some priving ellips and distinct the company of the same properties. some serious slice and dicing Better than the original



FAR CRY 2 PCZ Issue 201 – 90% A triumph of non-linear gameplay, Far Cry 2 offers an astounding chunk of Africa in which to play with guns, flames and explosions. The residents are too tenacious, but in a world this ell-realised, you won't care



CALL OF DUTY: MODERN WARFARE 2 PCZ Issue: 215 - 94%

Take all of the greatest action movies of all time, stick them together, and add some semi-manufactured controversies, and you have a massive hit. Still, it's an absolutely great shooter.



BIOSHOCK

PCZ Issue: 185 - 96% Despite the recent sequel having better gameplay, *BioShock* is still the superior game. Enter a destroyed Utopia under the sea, terrifying characters and emergent combat make this an unmiscable experience. unmissable experience

#### STRATEGY



**EMPIRE:** TOTAL WAR PC7 Issue: 205 - 94%

Vast yet manageable, accessible yet hardcore. All four words and more describe the best *Total War* game words and more described the less indivivory amoney can currently buy. With the addition of dramatic sea battles and an extended global campaign map, there's simply nothing else with the same grand scope that remains as easy to get into. We feel that the only game that will topple this game from its perch as the best strategy game around will be the next game in the Total War series. It really is that good.



COMPANY OF HEROES

PCZ Issue: 173 - 93% With this game Relic took the best bits from RTS games and best bits from RTS games and left out the crap, creating a game that's accessible, taxing and exciting. And its expansions Opposing Fronts and Tales of Valor keep the action coming.



**WORLD IN CONFLICT** 

PCZ Issue: 186 - 92% PCZ Issue: 186 – 92% A stunning RTS set during the Cold War, offering innovative online play, a solid single-player campaign that combines great gameplay and a good story, jaw-dropping graphics and the best nuclear blast you've seen.



CIVILIZATION IV

PCZ Issue: 162 - 92% A Buyer's Guide without a Civ game would be a sorry place, and the latest version is the greatest yet. Now with added warmongering and diplomacy in the expansion packs Warlords and Beyond the Sword.



SINS OF A SOLAR EMPIRE

PCZ Issue 193 - 91% This startling beauty of an RTS seemed to come from nowhere, and quickly converted us from indifferent idiots into grateful idiots by surprising us with accessible complexity.



MEDIEVAL II: TOTAL WAR

PCZ Issue: 175 - 91% A blend of maniacal plotting on the strategic map and cheering with delight as your warriors collide spectacularly with your opponents' armies. Middle Ages war fun.



SUPREME COMMANDER

PCZ Issue: 179 - 88% Huge battles of thousands of air, sea and land units? Giant stompy robots and a superb tactical map? One of the most original RTS titles around? Check, check and check.

#### **ACTION/ADVENTURE**



**GRAND THEFT AUTO IV** PCZ Issue: 203 - 91%

PCZ Issue: 203 – 9.1% We PC users have had to wait a while (OK – we had to wait a bloody age) before we could return to Liberty City with Niko Bellic, but the delay has been worth it. This version of *GTA4* adds graphics that are a cut above those seen on the consoles, expanded multiplayer modes, and an exclusive video editor, to Liberty City's free-roaming world and the sure-to-be-classic storyline of Bellic's American dream becoming an American nightmare.



MAX PAYNE 2: THE

PCZ Issue: 136 - 93% Payne is getting old, but it shows how to do bullet-time right. Noirish tone, a glowering voice-over and remarkable gun action mean that this is still a force to contend with



**ASSASSIN'S CREED 2** 

PCZ Issue: 220 - 90% Travel around Venice and Italy meet Da Vinci and make friends meet Da vinci and make miends with some prostitutes, run along walls and kill lots of people. It's Assassin's Creed, but with all of the kinks smoothed out, and plenty of depth added.



**FAHRENHEIT** 

PCZ Issue: 159 - 90% Murder most foul, and you're the killer. Fahrenheit boasts a twisting, turning, brilliantly told story, featuring multiple character control, split-screen tension, branching scenes and several endings.



PSYCHONAUTS PCZ Issue: 156 – 90% Clever, witty, impeccably detailed and off its rocker – Psychonauts is proof that the anarchic edge of LucasArts hasn't completely left us. A slightly flawed game in some respects, but still a dazzling feat.



**BEYOND GOOD & EVIL** 

PCZ Issue: 138 – 89%
We heap praise on this game on a monthly basis, but it's for a reason. Michel Ancel's superb journey through the strange land of Hillys is nothing short of storytelling magic. It's cheap now, so go out and buy it.



ARKHAM ASYLUM PCZ Issue 213:89%

Proof that licensed superhero games don't have to suck, Arkham Asylum's mix of action, RPG and stealth-'em-up play makes it a near classic. The best

Issue 199, 80%

BEASTS & 'BUM'PKINS

#### PCZ TOP 5 GAMES WITH THE SHORTEST NAMES

**I**ssue 42, 95%

Issue 83, 53%

Issue 159, 53%

4 GUN Issue 163, 72%

SAW Issue 218, 38%



#### **MMOs**



WORLD OF WARCRAFT PCZ Issue: 152 - 95% Blizzard's recreation of Azeroth as a living virtual world doesn't disappoint. While its graphics are dated, it's beautiful to watch absorbing to play and with more content than you can shake a



THE LORD OF THE RINGS ONLINE PCZ Issue: 182 – 87%

magic stick at

A near-perfect recreation of Tolkien's tales, with solid combat and engaging plots, in a tasty MMO bundle. Meet Gandalf! Play as a hobbit or a spider! Middle-earth awaits...



AGE OF RECKONING PCZ Issue: 200 - 92% Mythic slips Warhammer into wythic slips warndmine into their realm vs realm template. Even the most reluctant PvPer will launch themselves into huge open warfare, and drop into temporary group quests



**GUILD WARS** PCZ Issue: 156 - 94%

How to make a gaming accessible to the masses A lot of thought has been applied, and there are no subscription fees. Newbies can feel at home, thanks to a totally skills-based setup.



**FVF ONLINE** 

PCZ Issue: 130 - 88% Elite Online has been a long-held fantasy for old school gamers, and this space sim has come the closest yet to making it a reality. A slow pace belies the options on offer, from mining to trading to piracy

#### **SIMULATION**



X3: REUNION PCZ Issue: 162 - 92% Finally, a space sim to better X2:
The Threat, and it just happens to be the sequel. This is possibly the best-looking game ever to appear on a PC. Oh, and it plays pretty well to boot. Why not get be appeared to the proper which will be a Vision of the proper of the eunited with the X Universe



IL-2 STURMOVIK FORGOTTEN BATTLES PCZ Issue: 128 - 92% While flight sims are getting rarer and rarer, at least the quality remains high. None are more impressive than this ultra-classy WVII combat sim.



THE SIMS 3 PCZ Issue: 209 - 92% The Sims 3 is like having your very own reality TV show in your PC, and just as addictive. Near complete freedom of

Chocks away, comrade

gameplay lets you be a vicious diety, a benevolent dictator, or



MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR X
PCZ Issue: 175 – 89%

The latest (and maybe final) in the *Flight Simulator* series is the biggest since Microsoft started using actual polygons. What's more, the visuals may just sear your eyeballs.



**OPERATION FLASHPOINT:** DRAGON RISING PCZ Issue: 213 – 90%

Like its peer ArmA II, OpFlash 2 aims to bring realistic warfare to your PC. But unlike its peer this game doesn't forget it's meant to be fun, not some kind of military

#### DRIVING/RACING



PCZ Issue: 173 - 92%

Pick up this scarily realistic Pick up this scarily realistic driving sim and race the car of your dreams. It comes with an improved driving model, new game modes and many other improvements. Guaranteed to make you feel like the Stig.



COLIN MCRAF: DIRT 2 PCZ Issue: 214 - 90%

The new rally game bearing the name of the deceased driver is a stunner. A successful mix of an arcade racer and simulator, that has most sumptuous graphics of any racer around. This sequel is going to be tough to beat.



BURNOUT PARADISE:

PCZ Issue: 205 - 89% This game has set the standard for online arcade racers. Packs more speed than a drug dealer and more fun than slapping a bag full of Jonathan Rosses and



RACE DRIVER: GRID PCZ Issue: 195 - 88% Codemasters moves the series

Codemasters moves the series from its historical simulation roots, strips off the TOCA and creates a movie-realistic game with plenty of play modes and global challenges. Kind of like Burnout, but with proper tracks.



**NEED FOR SPEED:** SHIFT

PCZ Issue: 213 - 84% The Need For Speed series gets serious. Well, not too serious as the game is still weighed in the favour of fun over realism. But this is a polished release, and the best *NFS* around.

#### **ODDBALL**



PCZ Issue: 199 - 95% This is four charming minigames and an excellent space strategy game, glued together with a bunch of creation kits. It's also a beautiful one-off that is so well-realised that you should experience it yourself.



WORLD OF GOO

PCZ Issue 201 – 90%
A stroke of indie genius, World of Goo is a puzzler in which you erect fantastic goo-based structures across a myriad of unique and intriguing levels. Novel at every turn, this indie title is simply irresistible



PCZ Issue: 187 - 89% Ingenious and absurdly funny, Portal is a four-hour slice of Portal is a four-hour slice of perfect puzzles and discovery. Hurling yourself through floors and walls sounds odd, but modern games are rarely more delightful.



GARRY'S MOD PCZ Issue: 179 – 88%

PCZ ISSUE: 1/9 – 88% The God game-like Garry's Mod gives you the tools to create almost anything you can think of in the Source engine, from working robots to saucy ragdoll JPEGs. Fun and easy to use, try it out and see for yourself.



BRAID

PCZ Issue: 209 - 90% Braid is extremely pretentious, but extremely well made, with time-bending twists that'll provide a challenge to new and veteran platformers. It also has a secret editor for making your own levels.

#### **SPORT**



**FOOTBALL** MANAGER 2010

PCZ Issue: 214 - 88% Every year sees another Football Manager appear to break up relationships across the country. But while FM2010's updates mean it still holds the top spot, Champ Man is closing in



PRO EVOLUTION **SOCCER 2010** 

PCZ Issue: 214 - 85% The football industry may ignore PES, but PES doesn't ignore PC users. This year's PES includes updates from the console release, something that FIFA 2010 can't claim.



NRA 2K10

PCZ Issue: 214 - 90% Something of a niche product in the UK, this remains a fantastic sports game. Forcing you to use proper basketball tactics during matches that look like they're really on TV, NBA 2K10 proves it's the top of its league



FOOTBALL MANAGER

PCZ Issue: 205 - 85% All the joy of Football Manager with added MMO fun. Build your own team from scratch and develop your manager's skills, to let you take on other managers around the world.



CHAMPIONSHIP **MANAGER 2010** 

PCZ Issue: 214 - 80% With a new 3D match engine, With a new 3D match engine, and new features like the set piece creator, Champ Man 2010 has jumped up in quality. While it still can't match FM2010's depth, it's far more accessible.

#### **ROLE-PLAYING**



THE ELDER SCROLLS IV: OBLIVION PCZ Issue: 167 – 95% Oblivion's sublime graphics, oblivions sublime graphics, intuitive character-creation and massive freeform gameplay, put paid to the myth that you have to own a beard and live with your mum to enjoy RPGs.



FALLOUT 3

PCZ Issue: 201 - 91% While it does play like *Oblivion* in a sci-fi skin, this is a great openworld that's just as entertaining if you just wander across Washington state than if you follow the plot. And DLCs are adding to its greatness.



DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS PCZ Issue: 214 - 93%

By delivering an RPG that's at once realistic, brutal, heroic, sexy once realistic, brutal, neroic, sexy and immersive, BioWare have secured their position as masters of the RPG genre. We're already eager to see what they'll do with *Dragon Age 2*.



MASS EFFECT 2 PCZ Issue: 218 – 93%

Darker in tone than the original barker in tone fund and the Original but featuring refined. well... everything, Mass Effect 2 is a near-perfect mix of third-person gunplay and RPG storytelling. Just make sure you play Mass Effect first.



PCZ Issue: 93 - 94% This is the benchmark in RPGs-if not gaming. A twisting plot, exciting freeform levels and some moments of pure exhilaration and drama ensure Deus Ex remains the alpha male of the PC gaming world

#### LOG'S PICK



**BATMAN: ARKHAM ASYLUM** 

BAI MAN: ARKRIAM ASYLUM
PCZ Issue 213 – 89%
I'm saying Arkham Asylum because I didn't want to
say World of Goo. I love World of Goo, and I want
2D Boy to become ultra-billionaires riding around on
diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should
acknowledge that its 2010 now, and withdraw my

diamond-eyed dragons, but I also feel I should acknowledge that it's 2010 now, and withdraw my Goo-gushing until they make a new game. So, Arkham Asylum: the game I first played about 18 months ago, when a surprisingly complete preview copy fell into my hands. The game I played completely through, unable to write about half of it, because of the NDA that came with it. Still, it was a privileged feeling – it's not often you finish a game for a preview – and it actually felt slightly naughty, like I was getting more than I deserved.

But it was well-judged for Rocksteady. By the time I got to do my interviews and write the preview, I was already IOd% sold on their treatment of the caped bastard, and was desperate to write the actual review.

Well, that never happened – I never ended up reviewing Arkham Asylum for anyone. So those hours spent in the house, desperately telling an uninterested housemate that I was Batman, and he had to come and look because I was being Batman on the telly, can remain a pure memory for me. Batman... I never had to give you a score. This love transcends percentages. Give us a cuddle.

#### STEVE'S PICK



**GARRY'S MOD** 

PCZ Issue 179 - 88%

GARRY'S MOD
PCZ Issue 179 – 88%
If you want to play Garry's Mod on some of the game's more interesting servers (the Goonie Goon Gune servers are where you'll find the most amazing contraptions, in my opinion) you'll have to download about 4GB worth of content. This includes basic building blocks (something missing from the cache of Source-engine models shipped with Garry's Mod) as well as things like gears (which work as they should), railings along which spheres can roll, bits of jet planes and other very specifically useful objects. You'll also be downloading maps. One of which turns Garry's Mod into a space-combat arena, replete with planets you can fly between and explore, some with inhospitable atmospheres, others covered in ice, and all capable of being built on. See if you can construct a spacecraft that can not only deliver you safely to the planet surfaces, but also protects you from the horror-vacuum of space. Or, if you're rubbish at building, simply watch other players carefully and purposefully bolting their inventions together. It's a relaxing pursuit.

Guides (and a way of easily downloading that broad range of crap you'll need before you can play online) can be found at ggo, bottlabs.org – though if you can't be bothered with any of that, I implore you to just play about offline with the default gubbins. Even if it's all you can do to put Alyx in sexy poses.

INCOMING! Want to know what's coming out? Then turn to page 22 for the full run-down.





SATURDAY 24 JULY 2010

**SUNDAY 25 JULY 2010** 



reaven the

FOREIGNER



THE UNION



PLUS SPECIAL GUEST TBC **10E BONAMASSA BACHMAN&TURNER** 

UFO THE QUIREBOYS

### Black Label Society

SAXON

CATHEDRAL • HAMMERFALL **ORANGE GOBLIN** BLACK SPIDERS • NEW DEVICE







HÏGH'ON FIRE **AUDREY HORNE** LETHARGY

**PROG STAGE** 

## ANSATLANTIC



DWEEZIL

MARTIN TURNER'S WISHBONE ASH (PERFORMING ARGUS)

**TOUCHSTONE • PENDRAGON** 

# marillion

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# lardware

Better gaming through technology

#### **LOW-TECH HOLS**

'VE COME BACK from a week away in Devon at a place which made the absence of the internet and phone signals part of its sales pitch.

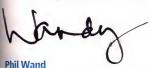
The thinking behind this is that once you retreat to an isolated place in the hills, without a regular flow of emails or the ability to post holiday snaps to Facebook and alert wouldbe burglars to your absence, you'll begin to unwind and enjoy a peaceful time free of all distractions.

Let me describe what a holiday without the internet means: to begin with, there are always a few stray messages that turn up just before the signal goes. You decide to read them, and discover one requires your attention: it's an email so the sender is expecting a prompt response.

So you stand outside, device held aloft like Benjamin Franklin with his kite. Nothing. The upstairs balcony? Still nothing. Outside on the fire escape - yes! A single bar, so the rickety stairs become a makeshift office. People inside ask muffled questions about coffee and then dinner so I retreat inside, freezing, and to a barrage of complaints about working on holiday.

On a trip out the next day, we pass a Little Chef promising free wifi, so I perform a Blues Brothers-style handbrake turn into the car park so the messages I composed yesterday are sent. Further complaints are voiced, culminating in thinly veiled death threats.

There's no peace without internet



Hardware editor

## **FERMI INFRIGIDATION**

Board makers turn to water-cooling for NVIDIA chip

RAPHICS CARD MAKERS Inno3D and EVGA have announced water-cooled variants of their flagship GTX 480 and GTX 470 products.

You may have already read that the most recent GeForce hardware has become something of a laughing stock, known for blistering heat levels as well as benchmark results. And this is despite NVIDIA reassuring potential buyers that the Fermi chip is designed to run at abnormally high temperatures.

Despite this; EVGA announced its water-cooled GTX 480 and 470 Hydro Copper FTW variants with Swiftech manufactured water blocks, and factory-set speed tweaks even before they were announced. And now Inno3D have tagged along with two Black Freezer models complimenting its existing high-end GTX line-up.



Inno3D is remaining tight lipped on availability, pricing and the actual specifications of their new card, but if their previous GTX 295 iChiLL Black Series is anything to go by, then the waterblock and fittings will be coming from Bitspower.

Assuming the build quality, attention to detail and capabilities remain similar

to that of the Bitspower-cooled Radeon 5870 Black Freezer, we might see flagship NVIDIA cards turning out benchmark scores significantly higher than any rival. Which is what we expected in the first place. inno3d.com

#### **INSTANT SIX PACK** Turn your quad into a hex

LAST MONTH WE reported that Core Unlocker, the ASUS motherboard feature that makes quad chips out of dual or triple core AMD CPUs.

Now, a new Phenom II X4 'Zosma' chip is being invited to the upcoming Phenom II X6 launch party, suggesting that the quad core newcomer is



actually a 'Thuban' hexa-core processor in disguise, and that Core Unlocker might enable its two disabled parts.

The two imminent Zosma models - the X4 960T and X4 940T - are likely to be priced close to £100, making their potential unlocking all the more appealing. As always, just don't expect it to work on every chip. uk.asus.com

#### **NEWS ROUND-UP**

**SAMSUNG WARNS PURCHASERS** of its new TVs: "Viewing in 3D mode may cause disorientation. DO NOT place your television near open stairwells, cables, balconies or other objects that may cause you to injure yourself. We do not recommend watching 3D if you need sleep or have been drinking alcohol." I've already ordered mine. samsung.com

FIGURES FROM THE US have shown PC shipments climbing by 25% or more in the first quarter compared with a year earlier, a figure much better than expected. Hewlett-Packard lead the way, with Lenovo, Dell and Acer chasing along behind, all posting very healthy sales increases. Most encouragingly, AMD returned to the black, with its revenue increasing by more than a third to \$1.57bn. amd.com



3D TV: According to Samsung, the most dangerous home entertainment device yet created. Do not buy one – even Samsung say they're lethal. PSU: Internet abbreviation. Highly insulting sexual accusation involving a skunk and a pineapple. ROP: Style of music involving rhythmically speaking lyrics over a heavy bass beat. Appeal limited to ex-public school types who like to tell everyone they know they're 'extremely street', yet run away from anyone wearing a hoodie. **WATERBLOCK:** Embarrassing and uncomfortable medical condition, often suffered by gamers of a certain age. Symptoms include repeated early morning trips to the loo accompanied by sensation of fail.

Dear Wandy
If it ain't broke, don't fix it. If it ain't
working don't paris

working, don't panic...

#### PROBLEMS?

Mistook your wardrobe for the toilet again? Local shop stopped stocking your favourite blue-flavoured Pringles? Been playing World of Warcraft so long your partner's left you? Wandy can't help with those setbacks, but we can solve all your hardware hassles. Wandy knows all, and he's willing to help if you email him at: wandy@dearwandy.com, including details about your problem and system specs.

**POWERED UP** I have a desktop PC comprising

a quad core Athlon II X4 630, ASRock N68C-S motherboard, 2GB RAM, 250GB HDD, an optical drive and a 450W PSU.

I'd like to upgrade my graphics card to a Radeon HD 5670. I chose this card because from what I've seen it doesn't require a huge amount of power. But I was wondering if this card will be fine with my PSU. If not, what card would you recommend? And if you think I should upgrade my PSU, I'll choose a much better GPU to go with it.

Any advice will be a great help to me as I don't have a clue when it comes to PCs or components!

#### Paul G

The Radeon HD 5670 needs a 400W power supply unit (PSU), but with at least 26A over 12V. This means that while your PSU meets the minimum wattage, you'll need to check how it delivers its power. There's a chance what you have has enough oomph to support a faster card such as the HD 5770, so it's worth doing.

To get your power unit's output specification, you'll need to read the sticker on its casing. The problem is that most of the time this will be obscured by the motherboard and processor cooling apparatus, not to mention cable spaghetti, so a safer bet is enter the model number into Google

favourite of mine, as an example it. offers 30A on a single 12V rail, and a maximum combined wattage of 360W. This makes it an ideal partner for lower-mainstream cards, given that

#### "A HD 5670 is unlikely to need more than 230W"

and check the manufacturer's site, then do the same for the GPU to ensure it all tallies up.

What you're looking for is a chart detailing the DC ratings for the various voltages needed inside your PC: that's 3.3V, 5V and 12V. Taking Corsair's 400W unit, a Seasonic-made £45

it offers plenty of amps, and that a HD 5670 is unlikely to need more than 230W

If it turns out your supply doesn't make the grade, replacing it isn't as difficult as it may seem. It's modular, the same as any other component in your PC, and as such can be easily

removed with a screwdriver and common sense.

My advice would be to look for a 600W or higher, known-brand replacement costing between £75-£100. Cheap suppliers use cheap components, and while they offer headline-grabbing wattage figures they rarely provide amps in the right places.

The HD 5570 lacks

a VGA connector.

#### MORE MONKEY **BUSINESS**

As per the recommendation printed in issue 220, I bought the Radeon card and got it fitted. However, when I flicked the switch several beeps sounded from the motherboard and it progressed no further. Although I could hear the new card's fan spinning, it lacked the power to boot up. This isn't much of a problem as I can return the card and get the money back, but I felt obliged to let you know.

#### Paul "Monkey Bloke" Johnson

You may recall that Paul here has a Fujistu-Siemens E3510 small form-factor PC with integrated GMA 3100 graphics and weedy CFX power supply. The saving grace is that the machine has a PCI-Express slot and my suggestion was to spend £70 on a new Radeon HD 5570. This is a lowformat graphics card, which has enough punch to run today's games.

Interested to know precisely why my suggestion didn't work I doublechecked the PCIe x16slot on the E3510, to make sure that there wasn't anything that would be inherently incompatible between old and new



#### **DRIVER WATCH**

#### **GRAPHICS**

MANU DESC RELEASED CATALYST 10.3 24 Mar 10 **NVIDIA** Force Ware 197.13 25 Mar 10

#### SOUND

MANU RELEASED Creative X-Fi Beta 2.18.0004 Creative Creative Alchemy 1.20.04 01 Aug 08 Creative Audigy Beta 2.18.0001 17 Jul 08

#### "In this mad consumerist world we live in, products are often priced at a level people are willing to pay"

hardware. There isn't and there shouldn't be

I am certain the problem is that the HD 5570 is simply asking for a level of amps that the factory fit Fujitsu power supply simply can't provide. I can think of no other reason why this PC would fail to even boot with that replacement card.

It must be said that the HD 5570 doesn't use much power. Manufacturer requirements vary slightly, but the minimum supported PSU it requires is 350W with 24A on the 12V rail.

Paul might want to try dropping to a Radeon HD 4650, but my fear would be that the evidence already gathered shows his existing PSU has been engineered down to a price, and its a system that really isn't designed for modern games.

Sometimes theory doesn't work in practice.

#### WHISTLES AND BELL

I'm going to be building a new PC soon and I've decided to go the i7 920 route as it seems to be the best bang for your buck. However, the number of X58 motherboards out there and the wild differences in prices is pretty baffling: boards

that are up to £100 different in price seem to have identical specifications, so what do you get for your extra cash?

Basically what I am after is the best value in terms of features, reliability and some gentle overclocking!

#### **Greg Stinson**

Like almost everything in this mad consumerist world we live in, products are often priced at a level people are willing to pay.

In the case of the £299 Rampage II Extreme, it would be churlish of me to suggest that it's that price simply because it fits with ASUS' marketing. For starters, the Rampage comes bundled with a discrete SupremeFX X-Fi audio card, 12 USB ports, an external LCD screen for on-the-fly BIOS changes, plus small but handy features like an easily accessible 'Clear CMOS' switch for when you screw those settings up. The moment you move down the price ladder you'll see expansion slots, ports and features dropping like flies.

That said, the ASUS Rampage is a product aimed at less than one in every 10 buyers, and unless you're someone who likes to measure board voltages with a multimeter -

ves, it helps you do

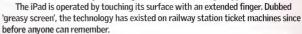
#### **ALL ABOUT...**

#### 27 APPLE IPAD

your laptop might look if someone sawed the keyboard off, halved the storage capacity, blocked up the USB ports and removed one of the speakers, wonder no more.

With a 4:3 screen resolution rivalling monitors found in landfill sites, the 1024x768 iPad appeals to myopic iPhone owners who don't want to make telephone

calls while simultaneously increasing their chances of being mugged.



And like ticket machines, the virtual keyboard you use is a stab-and-pray affair that can often lead to shouting, particularly when you realise Apple don't allow you to play Flash files and thus the device is of limited use as an aid to beating off.

Like the mono speakers, wireless support is just as innovative. Apple have detuned the iPad's wifi range so you must connect to the internet without moving more than six feet from your router, allowing people with very small houses to enjoy everything the device has to offer.

Pricing for the UK isn't known, but expect the iPad to cost a lot more than seems right, particularly as it doesn't even come with a mains adapter.

that too - then you're wasting your money on something that performs tricks you won't find the least bit entertaining or interesting.

What you really want is a board around the £150 mark that suits your overclocking needs and, in addition, gives you the room to add both

> a larger CPU cooler (look for space around the socket on the motherboard) and supports multiple graphics cards through providing support for CrossFire and SLI.

Given that, my choice would be the £165 ASUS P6T. Avoid the SE edition as it removes SLI support and the onboard reset button. At just £15 cheaper it's simply not worth bothering with, particularly given the overall cost of switching to an i7-based system in the first place.

iPad buyers heading for

their nearest Apple Store.

WATERBUG The water in Far Cry doesn't look right when set above medium detail. I don't think it's my graphics card as I've only started with this problem after upgrading from 512MB to 1GB.

#### My graphics card is a GeForce 7600 GS. Matthew Lea

In a release note that came with the 1.3 patch, Ubisoft stated that certain NVIDIA cards display a "water reflection bug" when the detail is set to high. There's no mention of this bug in later patches, suggesting it's still present. Sadly, Far Cry was last updated five years ago, so I'd not hold out any hope that the problem will ever be fixed. [133]



The P6T isn't as feature-rich as

the Rampage but is £140 less.

(Grinterloper) Hi everyone. Just put together my PC. Everything seems normal, the motherboard is intact and I assume working. The problem is it won't start up. When I power it up the fans start spinning, the internal and external power LEDs light up but then it beeps and shuts down. After a couple of seconds it attempts to boot up again but does the same thing. (Tetras) You are sure all the power connectors are firmly connected? Tried with only one stick of RAM? The CPU cooler fan is connected to the CPU cooler fan header and not a general fan header? (Grinterloper) Problem solved. I'm a nub who didn't hook the power up as well as he thought.

#### **HARDWAREREVIEWS**

#### **GRAPHICS CARD JARGON**

GPU: The Graphics Processor Unit runs the graphics card. VERTEX SHADERS: These create the outlines of objects in 3D scenes, by calculating the position of their vertices. They also generate textures, colour and lighting, and convert 3D scenes into 2D. This data is given to the... **PIXEL PIPELINES:** These process the data that forms pixels before sending it to a card' **ROPS:** Raster Operators combine the data from pipelines into pixels to make the final 2D image you see on screen. As with pixel pipelines and shaders, the more ROPs the better.



# **SAPPHIRE** HD 5670 IGB & HD 5770 VAPOR-X

PRICE £95/£145 MANUFACTURER Sapphire WEBSITE sapphiretech.com

E'RE GETTING TO the point where you can pick any number between 10 and 600 and be sure of finding a graphics card for that exact price. Making that point are Sapphire's everso-slightly enhanced 5770 Vapor-X and the all-new 5670.

The HD 5670 is yet another sub-£100 card in an already crowded marketplace. This Sapphire version is the IGB edition, doubling the memory allocated to the stock version and

#### SPECIFICATION

	HD 5670	HD 5770 VAPOR-X
GPU CLOCK	775MHz	860MHz
SHADERS	400	800
MEMORY	1GB GDDR5	1GB GDDR5
MEMORY BUS	128-bit	128-bit

adding another £20 onto the price. It's essentially an even more stripped-down version of the HD 5770 than the already rather helpless HD 5750.

A stock HD 5670 has got the same number of ROPs, memory interface, and the same GDDR5 as a HD 5770, but half the shader count, slower clockspeeds and half the RAM. The effect of this is that despite this edition having 1GB of memory, it only delivers a performance boost of 3fps.

The real selling point of the HD 5670 is the fact that it doesn't need a PCI-E

power cable as it gets its power from the PCI-E umbilical bus. Realistically, this card is for media centre PCs with low-powered PSUs that need a boost.

The 5670 only offers Direct X 11 support as an incentive if you need a cheap, bus-powered card opt for an NVIDIA GT 240.

On the other hand, the HD 5770 Vapor-X wouldn't look out of place in a mid-range gaming setup. Thanks to updated drivers, both the stock and this slightly overclocked version can deliver over 40fps in Far Cry 2 at 1680x1050. The bad news is that while the price has dropped on the standard model (only to £110, mind), the Vapor-X edition sells for £145.

This £35 premium gives you an extra 10MHz extra clock speed, and nothing else spec-wise. The thing that really makes it different to an off-the-shelf card is its Vapor-X cooler. The presence of this is aimed at overclockers, but there's little point in tweaking this card's settings.

The standard card tops 30fps in our 1680x1050 benchmarks, Overclocking the card can't add more than a few

#### **GPU PERFORMANCE**

FPS @ 1680x1050	HD 5670	HD 5770 VAPOR-2
FAR CRY 2*	26fps	42fps
WORLD IN CONFLICT*	23fps	36fps
COLIN MCRAE'S DIRT 2*	23fps	36fps
* DirectX 10 test * DirectX 11 te	est	

frames per second to that, due yo the limitation of the HD 5770's 128-bit memory bus.

Really, you're better off saving up for another month and getting a HD 5850 for £50 more. That's a great card at pretty much any resolution.

Ultimately, the HD 5670 1GB only gives 3fps more at 2560 x 1600, and nothing at lower resolutions, making the extra £20 for the extra RAM irrelevant. In contrast, the Vapor-X HD 5770 is pricier still and gives you no performance boost at all. by

PRICE £200 MANUFACTURER AMD WEBSITE www.amd.com/uk

**AMD ALREADY DOMINATES** the low, mid and high-end of the DirectX 11 graphics sector, while NVIDIA has yet to log in yet. But AMD aren't resting; they're bringing out more cards in every conceivable price bracket.

The HD 5830 is supposed to cover the gap between the HD 5770 and the HD 5850 – a gap few were aware existed. To do this AMD has made a card that's only slightly better than a HD 5770, and far worse than a HD

#### **BENCHMARKS**

FPS @ 1680x1050

FAR CRY 2\* 45fps WORLD IN CONFLICT\* 38fps

COLIN MCRAE'S DIRT 2\*

\* DirectX 10 test \* DirectX 11 test

5850, and yet sits in the middle of the two in terms of price.

Luckily, the decision about whether to buy with this card is easy to make: don't bother. This is a half-baked, halfway house of

The HD 5830 uses the same 40nm Cypress chip as the HD 5870 and HD 5850 cards, but has half the memory bus and ROPs count of ATI's top-end cards.

That hobbles it to the extent it can only just hold up against the Juniperbased HD 5770 (issue 216, 82% for the

This card is a complete waste of a time. stock model; see the left-hand page for

Vapor-X edition). Unless one of AMD's partners finds a way to unlock the HD 5830's 256-bit memory interface and open up the HD 5770's ROP count, you shouldn't consider getting this card. Either get a

HD 5770 and save yourself a bit of cash,

**SPECIFICATION** 

or pay extra and get а HD 5850. **р**Ј

MEMORY

MEMORY SPEED

MEMORY INTERFACE

800MHz

1GHz

128-hit

1GB GDDR5

"The decision about whether to buy with this card is easy to make: don't bother"

CE Mine 8.

## KINGSTON SSDNOW V+

38fps

PRICE £290 MANUFACTURER Kingston WEBSITE kingston.com

**BECAUSE THE DEVELOPMENT** and making of solid state drives' flash memory and controller chipsets is complicated, these key components of SSDs are only made by a few of companies. This means most SSDs are actually similar on the inside, so companies like Kingston are at the mercy of their suppliers.

The Kingston SSDNow V 40GB drive was based on Intel's secondgeneration SSD technology. It was a great drive at a brilliant price, but Intel

#### **SPECIFICATION**

CAPACITY 128GB INTERFACE SATA II TYPE MLC Flash Memory 128MB DDR2 CACHE CONTROLLER Toshiba T6UG1XBG killed it off when they withheld a crucial firmware update from Kingston. Kingston says that all is forgiven now, but this revised SSDNow V+ doesn't use Intel tech.

The drive's controller is a new chip from Toshiba that Kingston says enables 230/180MBps sequential read/write speeds. Our benchmark tests were in line with Kingston's claims, but things got complicated during the 4K and 64-thread tests. Here, the new V+ Series did worse than the old Intel-based 40GB V Series, but closely enough to rival 128GB drives.

Apart from speed the SSDNow V+ offers a satisfyingly robust metal

chassis and SATA II support. That's a welcome feature as SSDs are becoming too fast for SATA I interfaces to cope with.

46146181801 / 9905460 - 001 ADOLF

Assembled in PHILIPPINES

Subjectively during testing this SSD gave a fast, responsive, stutterfree performance. But, as with all solid state drives, there are still some questions regarding its long-term performance and reliability. JL

"During testing this SSD gave a fast, responsive, stutter-free performance"

## If it had 'Intel Inside' it'd be better.

#### **BENCHMARKS**

MEGABYTES PER SECOND

MAX SEQUENTIAL WRITE 170 MAX SEQUENTIAL READ 234 4K RANDOM WRITES

64-THREAD RANDOM WRITES



#### **REMEMBER:** CLICK, CLICK,

CLICK, GRIND = A SICK HARD DRIVE Should you hear the following noises from your PC as it starts up: CLUNKCLUNKCLICKCLICK GRUUUND it means your hard drive is about to fall apart and you should get a new one. This doesn't happen with silent solid state drives, instead they just stop dead. The gits.

# Hardware Buyer

This is our favourite PC gear - both expensive and cheap

#### LOADED?

GRAPHICS

**ASUS RADEON HD 5970** 

PRICE £499 uk.asus.com

The Radeon HD 5970 is the world's fastest video card, making it an obvious choice for this slot. Under that plastic shroud are two AMD RV870 GPUs, whose 4.3 billion transistors and 3,200 shader processors knock the GeForce GTX 295 out of the stadium and into the car park. Despite all this power it's not even particularly noisy when under load. If you have one of these cards you'll need at least a 600W PSU.





INTEL **CORE I7 975** PRICE £770 intel.com

The most extreme, most unlocked edition of Intel's quad core, multithreading flagship processor laughs at all modern games. The only reason not to get one is the imminent Core i7 980X, which will have six Hyper-Threading cores and 12MB Smart Cache and be even more jaw-droppingly stunning.



**AUZENTECH** X-FI FORTE 7.1 PRICE £119 auzentech.com

There was a time when you couldn't build a PC without a Sound Blaster. Today it's all handled by mobos and only fruitcakes buy discrete hardware. Oh really? The Forte is mad for games like nothing else: Dolby Digital Live, DTS Connect, even headphone and mic amps. Proper stuff.



LP2475W PRICE £450

You can buy a 24in widescreen monitor for £150 these days. So why would you want this one? Simple: professional H-IPS screen technology, two DVI-I ports, DisplayPort, HDMI, six USB ports, height adjust, rotate, swivel and tilt, plus 1920 x 1200 pixels to stare at. Why not buy two?



**ASUS** RAMPAGE II **EXTREME** PRICE £259 uk.asus.com

ASUS claim the Rampage II Extreme is the "ultimate overclocking board", and looking at the design and specification it's hard to find a more attention-grabbing mobo. It has a massive array of tweaking tools, and you get a SupremeFX daughterboard with a X-Fi processor thrown in.



WESTERN **DIGITAL** CAVIAR BLACK PRICE £220 westerndigital.com

Forget solid state for a moment: we're after a data tanker that'll swallow music, movies and your Steam folder. For that there's only one choice: the WD2001FASS. Don't be fooled into thinking that large drives are slower than smaller ones. This 2TB model is top of the HDD benchmarks.



LOGITECH Z-5500 PRICE £249 logitech.co.uk

We've been advocating Logitech's THX flagship since it was launched in 2005, and although the silver plastic does tend to make it look a little dated alongside new rivals, the simple fact is that great sound never goes out of fashion. Nothing rivals the Z-5500s at this price.

GRAPHICS

**SAPPHIRE RADEON HD** 5750 VAPOR-X

sapphiretech.com

While you could save yourself the cost of a game and buy NVIDIA's GTS 250, Sapphire's HD 5750 is faster, almost silent (courtesy of Vapor-X tech) and brings cool technology within reach of most gamers. Features such as DX11 support, ATI Eyefinity and DisplayPort connectivity simply aren't available on any GeForce, And thanks to CrossFire. the upgrade path is obvious: buy the same card twice.







**AMD PHENOM** II X4 955 BI ACK PRICE £122 amd.com

With the faster 965 Black at £139 and Core i5-750 at £152, spending that extra £30 on Intel's little belter will sure put a wider grin on your face. But when £30 could buy your hard drive or a set of speakers, and you're on a tight budget, it has to be the Phenom.



IIYAMA E2208HDS-2 PRICE £134 iivama.co.uk

Cheap and unknown brands are often tempting, but many are based around yesterday's technology and won't support connections more exotic than a 15-pin analogue VGA. Which is why we'd go for this 22in Iiyama, with DVI-D, full HD resolution and integrated speakers.



**GIGABYTE** GA-MA770-UD3 PRICE £49 gigabyte.com.tw

Available for less than £50, GIGABYTE's GA-MA770-UD3 supports AMD's most recent AM3 processors including the Athlon II and Phenom II X4, X3, and X2, and DDR3 RAM of up to 1,666MHz. It also features RAID and onboard eight-channel HD audio, but there's no CrossFire support.



**SEAGATE** BARRACUDA 500GB PRICE £33 seagate.com

Seagate's 12th generation ST3500418AS drive costs peanuts, but a decent capacity means it'll cater for most media collections and a nod to the enthusiast market means it'll turn out some of the best benchmarks going. There are good reasons why it's the world's most popular desktop drive.

NONE PRICE £0 N/A

If you're strapped for cash, the last thing you want to be wasting money on is a sound card. It's simply not necessary. Every mainstream motherboard on sale today offers multi channel audio, so hook up your speakers there instead. You'll never notice the difference.





LOGITECH X-210 PRICE £25 logitech.co.uk

Another win for Logitech, a brand people still associate with mice. The X-210s are great value, and despite looking and feeling every inch the £25 speaker set, deliver subassisted audio that transcends their budget status. At this price you might find classier speakers, but never a more classy sound.

# ADMANCED AME OF THE PLANTET 19





PC GAMER PRESENTS: CRYSIS 2 ON SALE NOW! PC GAMES MAGAZIN

Available online with free delivery. Google 'GamesRadar Shop' for details.

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# Freeplay

Mods, maps and free things!

#### MISANTHROPY

M I THE only person in the world who doesn't get on very well with competitive online gaming? I used to play Counter-Strike a lot, but now I won't go anywhere near it. Likewise with new games like Bad Company 2. I've been trying to force myself to play it, to endure for the sake of potentially finding that reason for playing, but I'm finding it very difficult to stay with it. Perhaps the biggest culprit is you, the player. Not you specifically, but the more general you, the man on the forum, the person who spends every waking moment making my online life hell.

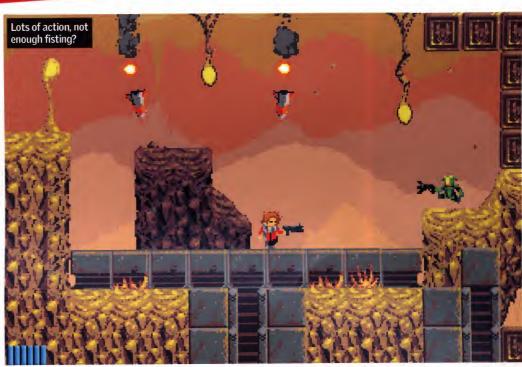
In fact, I'd hazard a guess that you yourself aren't one of the people that annoy me. I'm talking the ones who are level 40+ on BC2 or in the 70s or whatever in Modern Warfare 2. The people who I automatically assign negative, hateful characteristics to for having killed me. It may be irrational, but I can't help aiming mental daggers at players called 3l33T-^Kill4h^ who have just downed me yet again with their unlocked gun that I'll have to play another month to get.

I'll stick to co-op for now, or at least attempt to get people I know onto small-scale competitive games. That avoids the shroud of anonymity colouring my reaction to every single death and I can begin to enjoy the game for once.

Random people are the curse, bane, blight and pus-filled oozing boil on the bottom of the multiplayer gaming scene for me and I'm not sure there's anything that can be done, other than my seeing a psychiatrist. Back to *Left 4 Dead* for me then.



David Brown Staff writer



FISTS AND FUN Edward Fenning takes the Action Fist!

WEBSITE teknopants.com/games/actionfist

whose title tells you exactly what you're getting: Action

Fist!. You know there's going to be action, some fists will fly and the plot will be silly (thanks to the well-placed exclamation mark).

Anyone who played on a SEGA Genesis might remember a game called Gunstar Heroes, which acts as a major inspiration for this title. If you weren't gaming in 1993, Action Fist! is a side-



scrolling shoot 'em up that allows two people to fight their way through a variety of levels and bosses by playing on the same keyboard. This is truly old-school co-op play.

For a free game, this is phenomenally polished, having specially composed music and the original artwork and animations. And, like games of yore, it's not afraid to rake you over the coals either. Although the amount of continues you have is infinite, each time you die you're thrown back to a checkpoint and lose all of your hard-earned weapon upgrades. This never makes the game too hard to carry on, but can be annoying at times.

Even when put on normal difficulty Action Fist! proves to be a sufficient and ultimately satisfying trial to beat. Though sometimes brushing the edge of frustration, it never crosses over into the realms of a ragequit.

Though the whole game can be beaten in a couple of hours, the pure joy and challenge of it can keep you coming back for spurts or longer sessions, especially with the option to close the game down and pick it up again where you left off.

Action Fist! feels like a successful and brilliant homage to all the side-scrolling platformers and shoot 'em ups of the past three decades, whilst still existing as a distinct title all by itself.

PCZONE FREE-O-METER











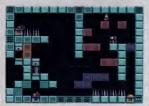
#### **SNIPPETS**



#### HONEYSLUGGISH

potoandcabenga.com A Gamma IV indie showcase winner at this year's GDC, Poto & Cabenga is

a game where pressing Space controls a humanoid with a vellow guiff and a curious purple cow/bird thing at the same time. Confused? Try playing it.



#### **VERLASTING LIFE**

killme.chown.dk

It's an unwritten rule of games that your character should want to stay alive, but that's exactly what you're not trying to do in Kill Me, a platformer with a character that cannot die



#### STACKED ACTORS

snipurl.com/hypermorinp Here's an idea for a new Olympic sport: Hyper Morinpic, a game where you stack (seemingly rather slippery) athletes on a big Japanese noodle bowl. Yes, that'll do nicely.



# **TRAIN HARDER**

Open source *Transport Tycoon* thrills and excites

WEBSITE openttd.org/en

**HERE ARE FEW** games that inspire inexplicable devotion like transport management games. Certainly, Transport Tycoon Deluxe stands out from the herd as an iconic title given special praise and worship, so much so that a team of enthusiasts have spent six years fashioning their own open-source version of Chris Sawyer's classic connect-'em-up game.

A belter it is, as well. Let's dazzle each other with facts and figures for a moment. First of all, let it be known that the game maps, while huge enough in the original, are now a staggering 64 times bigger than previously.

If that wasn't enough, you could be one of 255 players in a multiplayer game, split between 15 companies or just spectating. Delving deeper into the features list, eyes begin to water when you read about pre-signals, semaphores, path-based signalling and having multiple trees on one tile.

We could argue that any attempts by commercial companies to shove another management game into the

marketplace will be blown out of the water by this release, which is mindboggling and comprehensive in scope. However, a word of caution if you're considering shoving the cover disc into your CD drives and giving it a bit of a go: OpenTTD is very, very complex and it even drove one of our work experience lads to despair.

So be prepared for an experience so complex, your mind may well melt as you attempt to understand it.

#### **CRYENGINE FREE Modders and indie devs** could soon Cry(sis) in joy

WEBSITE crytek.com

THE RELEASE OF the CryEngine 2 made it a meaningful competitor to the Unreal Engine and Source. Now Crytek's Cevat Yerli has come out in support of those using his engine, and it seems that Crytek might release a free version of the CryEngine 3 in the near future.

One of the stumbling blocks behind amateur teams deciding to create their own games or mods is the massive up-front costs of licensing engines. With the release of the Unity engine and Epic's Unreal SDK for free, a slew of new titles soon appeared on reputable mod and indie websites.

Yerli is hinting that the CryEngine will be pushed out to the general public in a standalone form rather than a general engine release. This means it would be positioned against *Unity* in the freemium market, where a cut-down version of the engine would be available gratis to modders and indie developers.

Any efforts by developers to share the wealth and support the grass roots of the industry are always good, and it should herald a new wave of interesting and visually exciting games, just as the proliferation of the Unreal Engine 3 did a few years back.

This is also an idea that could reap rewards with Unity passing the 100,000 registered users mark in under four months since they made their Unity Indie platform freely available.





which give you a little boost to your stats, although the generic EA clubs are reasonable alternatives should you not wish to spunk out some money. As a free player, you're limited to just th two courses (at the time of writing) with green fees attached to them, which basically means you spend

It's not necessarily going to be the new shining light in PC sports games, but it's a decent first step along the road to long-term rehabilitation for the genre. With FIFA Online 2 coming along as well, there might be some life left in the old dog, but it might need a more expansive portfolio for the free

As for the actual whacking and putting itself, it's just like playing that pirated version of Tiger Woods PGA Tour 08 that you're pretending you



## **SNIPPETS**



#### **BOTTLE O' RUM**

Treasure Island Online is a grid-based multiplayer game where you have to find a chest of doubloons hidden on a small island, with every player trying to beat each other to the gold



#### **BETTER EFFORT**

moddb.com/mods/operation-stargate

Last month we saw the utterly awful Stargate: Resistance. This month, we found this upcoming mod for Oblivion which should be miles better.



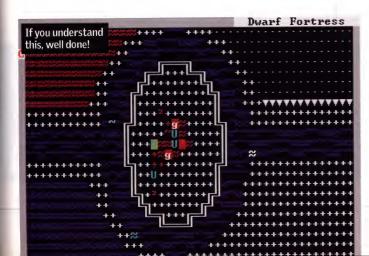
# **MORE DWARVES, PLEASE**

for nothing for

as long as you want"

Dwarf Fortress gets updated, new material system excites all

WEBSITE bay12games.com/dwarves



#### **OUR CURRENT OVERLORD. Mr**

Hogarty, loves ASCII dwarves, reaffirming his bond with Dwarf Fortress' bewildering realms every so often. So you can imagine his delight when it was discovered that it'd received one hell of an update.

One of the more exciting new tweaks is the material system, which allows water to freeze on people or liquid gold collecting on a tile to cool into a glob of solid gold. This release's mightily

comprehensive change list can be seen in full at snipurl.com/dwarffortupdate.

If you've been away from your ASCII dwarves for a while, this might be enough to bring you back to it. It's certainly worked on our editor, who is currently busy seeing how much fun he can have diverting rivers and experimenting with fluid levels, as

As comprehensive updates go, not much beats Dwarf Fortress.

# vemos

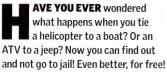
**ON THE** 



James Ireland takes a spin on the DVD

# JUST CAUSE 2

Grappling with yourself is good clean fun



Don't let the fact the plot and dialogue leave something to be desired. If anything, a plot would get in the way of all the fun you can have - completely ignoring it is the best course of action.

The grappling hook is by far the best part of the game. Folk may shoot at you as you slingshot yourself around the island, but you'll never entirely be sure why. Maybe it's because they've been deprived of your grappley attentions. You should grapple them to something that will make them happier.

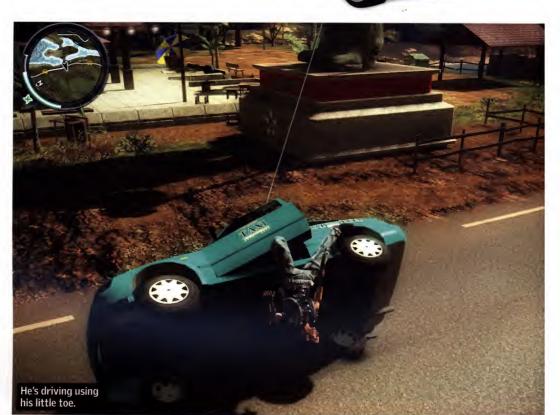
There are beautiful vistas aplenty, and even when underwater you can see that a lot of care has been taken in building a world you can completely lose yourself in. It's almost a shame that you then decide to utterly destroy it. Almost. Remember that this demo needs Vista or Windows 7 to work.

#### **PROBLEM ZONE**

Trouble with your DVD? Help is at hand!

- 1. If the menu doesn't appear when the disc spins up, open the Run command from the Start menu and enter D:\pcz.exe (D is the DVD drive's letter).
- 2. If you have a problem with a specific demo or application, check the DVD's Help section. Also ensure your PC's drivers and DirectX version are up-to-date.
- 3. If that doesn't work check our forums at pczone.co.uk for fixes, or send an email to us at letters@pczone.com. Please describe the problem, what you were doing when it occurred, any erro messages that came up, and your system's details.
- 4. If the DVD itself is faulty, send it and an SAE to Disc Department, Reader Support, Future Publishing Ltd, Bath, BA1 2BW, to get a new one.

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#### DOUBLE BARRELLED

First, take your shotgun and stare menacingly into the camera. This not only makes you look cool, but also.... no, it just makes you look cool





#### **FOUGHT THE LAW**

At this point the filth will be coming, so you best pop off sharpish. But not before throwing a few grenades toward the accumulated wreckage and running away swiftly



#### **BABY BOOMER**

A good way to get a big juicy chaos rating is to pull down a statue of Baby' Panay. Explosives are a tried and tested favourite, but you may wish to improvise.



#### **FALLING DOWN**

After finding a suitable method (do not see above), you may rejoice! The deed is done, take that you dictating... well now Mr Panay, there's no need to be so uncouth.

## **NAPOLEON: TOTAL WAR**

### France v East Germany in Euro 1815

WEBSITE totalwar.com

TIME FOR THE triumphant return of Total War. This time round it's Napoleon's turn to conquer.

Just in case you've been living under a rock in an intra-dimensional pocket of n-space for the last gazillion years, the demo includes



a land tutorial - Siege of Toulon, which gives you the opportunity to give the British Army a thrashing. Yay! Destroy the British! Actually, don't. Please leave us alone.

Also included in the demo is the historical Battle of Ligny, an epic

> collision of Prussian and French forces. You may play as either side, and attempt to turn the other lot into a warm, runny paste that resembles raspberry jam.

This will give you a taste of what the full, remarkably in-depth strategy game offers.

The demo, not the jam.

#### **CROTCH ATTACK**



#### PAINFUL

Zooming in close let's you see people being stabbed in the gonads. Always worthwhile.



#### **DIY FORTS**

Makeshift fortifications will keep your men safe while they blast away at the enemy.

WAR IS HELL

**WELL ARMED** 

This fellow shows the correct

shield technique. You hold it in

front of you, facing the guys

trying to kill you with arrows.

A bunch of other stuff you'll find on your disc, if you click hard and fast enough, that is...



#### **DWARF FORTRESS**

The ultimate ASCII game. Good fun, but with an extraordinary learning curve. Come and have a go if you think you're hardcore enough



#### GRATUITOUS SPACE BATTLES

positech.co.uk/gratuitousspacebattles A fun and slightly madcap indie game that's perfect for lunch breaks, hungover mornings, or both.



#### RISE OF PRUSSIA

paradoxplaza.com/games/rise-of-prussia This demo lets you invade Saxony, and gives you a chance to play the opening of the grand campaign



#### **GERMAN TRUCK SIMULATOR**

You do have to keep to the speed limit and stop for lights, but hitching your trailer manually is extremely exciting.

## **MOUNT&BLADE: WARBAND** Spearing farmer's wives

WEBSITE mountandbladewarband.com

#### GET BACK TO the fray with

Mount&Blade: Warband. Assemble your troops, grab a mean looking axe, and go looking for innocent villagers to plunder. Or villages.

Plowing your trusty steed right into the heart of an enemy formation, before lashing out wildly with a sod-off axe

feels amazing. There are dozens of castles to siege, villages to plunder, and kings to kill.

Warband includes a 64-person multiplayer, a new faction, the ability to marry, make vassals and, if you're really good, become the Kina.

Install it now, we beseech thee.

#### 1. DIRECT

You could just charge right at the enemy, but that will earn vou insta-death.

#### 2. DEE FENCE

Clumping all your men in one place is bad. No castle

Sometimes the enemy will break through your line, so retreating to these walls can be advisable. Fleeing isn't always cowardly.

has just one entrance.

#### 3. RUN AWAY!

**SNAPPED ARM** And here's a moron. This kind of shield technique will get you poked full of holes.



#### **SETTLERS 7 DEMO**

At 2.5GB this is a hefty demo, considering it only has one map and a tutorial video. But let that slide and you'll find a fun little nugget that'll give you a good taste of what the full version involves.



#### **NETKAR PRO DEMO**

In this realistic racing game demo you have access to only

one car and one track. This is more than enough to get a feel for the full thing though, and you'll quickly find out whether it's to your taste



# Freeware

James Ireland seeks a good time, but can't pay





So dedicated are we to revealing the best free games around that to deliver less would induce us to commit seppuku so as to regain our

honour. This month, descend into ASCII dungeons, shrink to the size of a pea, and impale your nads on a spiky ball, before riding a pink unicorn off into the sunset.

# **GLICK'S**

But it is out to get me!

#### REDIVIDER

**DEVELOPER** Nathan McCoy WEBSITE snipurl.com/redivider

THIS IS A simple yet fiendishly difficult game. Using your mouse to drag a line over the screen, you must cut the green circles, separate the blues, and avoid the greys. And just like that you lose an hour of your life.

The first few levels are easy enough: cut a couple of greens, separate some blues, then everything starts to move. Then they throw in the greys. This makes things exponentially more difficult, as greys swirl among the pretty greens and blues. Whoever designed level 16 is deserving of respect. It's utterly frustrating, yet completely amazing.

The later levels are harrowing, and the red flash of the game over screen quickly becomes a familiar sight, but when you do manage to solve a level. by God it's satisfying.

The only qualm is that most of the puzzles can be solved by random clicking. So do this for a few minutes and you'll eventually find the way to get that last green circle you spent the last 20 minutes weeping over, caressing the screen, and offering your soul to The Great Unclean One, if only he'll let you splice the bloody thing.

## EPORTOWER

Note to self: little blue hats are not spike proof

F THIS GAME was food, it'd be spag bol: a classic, but if you don't have the technique down, it makes you look like a moron.

*Teleportower's* premise is simple: there are two sides to each level, and you must use your teleporting ability to get to the pretty yellow gem.

As the levels progress you encounter sharp spikey things that kill you should you jump on them, trampolines that boost your paltry two square jump to four whole squares, and a teleport door which allows you to teleport to the other door on

#### **BEAMING AROUND**

Once you get the hang of using the tools given to you (including hanging), the game becomes relatively easy, and it's rare that you pause for more than a couple of seconds before completing a level.

You can get to the fourth tower pretty quickly, and then it gets a little more taxing. At this point you may find yourself staring dumbfounded at the screen, with dead eyes and a blank expression, waiting for inspiration to strike. You can't just jump around until you find the right sequence of moves either as these are clever puzzles, so you must carefully work out your strategy before pressing

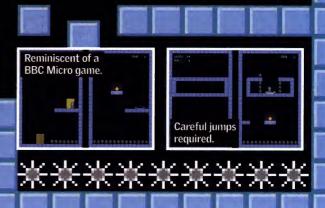


anything. When your eureka moment does strike, you find yourself reassessing your intelligence, feeling rather stupid indeed.

Teleportower's last few levels are a real challenge, and the final last tower is an unrelenting and vicious gauntlet: your timing must be perfect, and your movements precise. It's difficult, but in

a great way. You always feel the gem is just beyond your reach, just a couple more tries and you can get it.

> That said, it does feel as though the first tower is far too easy, and that could well be off-putting. Bear with Teleportower, and it will test your button mashing skills to their limits.



## **MADNESS**

#### You are likely to be eaten by a grue

**DEVELOPER** hmp **WEBSITE** tinyurl.com/madnessgame

MADE FOR THE Seven Day

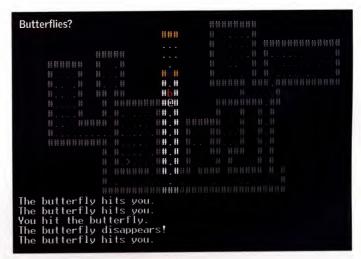
Roguelike Challenge, Madness is an exploration of dungeons, darkness and sanity. You play an adventurer who must traverse the 10 floors of the dungeon and defeat the dungeon master, while protecting yourself from baddies and staving off insanity (presumably caused by ASCIII characters assaulting you).



At first the enemies are easy and singular; a little rat to stomp beneath your +1 Leather Boots. Later you encounter more powerful enemies: goblins, orcs, and of course, ogres. These tougher enemies take more than a couple of kicks to fell, but they aren't the only threat facing your adventurer.

You have a sanity counter, and when it starts dropping, you better watch out. If it falls too low, ghost bats appear in swarms, dogging your every move, and robot unicorns attack in droves. You must restore your sanity by using potions, but care is needed as levels are never the same, so you don't know where your next potion will come from.

Darkness adds to your unsure situation and a torch is always handy.



Who knows, without one, you may be eaten by a grue, or perhaps killed by an imaginary butterfly.

This is certainly an impressive endeavour for only 168 hours work, and a great introduction to the roguelike genre, especially if you're new to these

back-to-basics games. A fresh driving concept doesn't hurt either, the effects of madness are amusing and add yet another challenge to the game.

Here's hoping there are more good games out of the Roguelike Challenge

EBGAME

## GEM CRAFT

### Yes, it's another tower defence game

**DEVELOPER** Armor Games **WEBSITE** freewaregames.net/gemcraft.asp

IN THIS COOL little tower defence web game, you play a wizard holed up in his tower who must create magic gems and place them atop pillars to destroy waves of incoming enemy insects. (At least we think they're insects.) As you advance through the game, the number of waves increase, but so does your power.

It's easy to pick up and play, and within a couple of rounds you'll be building defences Sun Tzu would be proud of. One of the keys to building a good defence is combining the gems. This costs mana, but is well worth it. You can mix two of the same gem to create a pure version which will boost their original stats, or you can blend different gems to get different effects.

Positioning of towers is also paramount, as you need them to lay down an unrelenting barrage, rather than occasionally hit something.

There are other weapons available to our wily mage. He has access to traps which are activated by placing

gems in them. These act in a similar manner to towers, other than they don't actually shoot things.

You can also activate charge towers. which are pre-placed on the map, by sacrificing a gem to them. The tower then lashes out with electricity, killing pretty much everything around it. These towers have limited charges however, so must be used wisely.

This is a fun web game and well worth a half-hour of your time. Perfect for a lunch break.







**DEVELOPER** Ken Grafals WEBSITE snipurl.com/specterspelunker

IN THIS UNITY-BASED platformer the player must find a way to traverse a level and overcome obstacles by changing size. Doing this warps the entire level into something new as unreachable ledges become steps and tiny holes become vast caverns.

When the character shrinks, time slows. Red blocks that would otherwise hurtle into you now float along slowly. It would have been good to have some extra functions to the growth/shrink mechanic, but Spelunker remains a great idea, and it'll be interesting to see if Grafals will build on this concept.

# Extend



James Ireland delivers some choice mods and maps









**FRAGMENTS** OF FERELDEN

The Ginger Strikes Back

MOD FOR Dragon Age: Origins WEBSITE social.bioware.com/project/1504

HIS CAMPAIGN FOR Dragon Age sees you, a knight-errant, called upon to search out and destroy an Alpha Hurlock residing in a mysterious labyrinth.

Fragments of Ferelden was only released a couple of months after the Dragon Age Toolset became available. Given the time in which it was produced, this is a very impressive little mod. Clocking in at around three hours of game time, it's a reasonable length, sending you from level one to nine.

The combat is somewhat reliant on potion spamming, as you are alone for the entirety of the mod. Fortunately you start out with the ability to make potions, though this can become something of a chore. It may be a quick and dirty way of balancing the game,

but it does do the job without being a complete game-breaker.

The balance is shifted in favour of area effect attacks and a decent level of protection, so Rogues and Mages without AoE spells may not cope in some of the larger battles. This can be solved by exploiting pulling areas, taking on foes one at a time, or by standing at a distance and twanging away with your trusty bow.

The battles aren't entirely bad, and there's a lot of good to be found in the latter stages of the mod, when our brave Templar must track down and kill the Alpha. The run up to the final battle involves killer brontos and hordes of minions. As always, it's extremely satisfying to freeze

a dozen enemies, and then hack their friends to pieces.

The story is somewhat confused, and it's never made clear how the different parts of Ferelden came to be within this labyrinth. This is further complicated by the modder's choice of plot delivery. Most of the information about the plot and quest appears in text on the screen while you're exploring, which is a rather sloppy way of handling things. While the original game depended on Codex entries to flesh out the quests' stories, this option has been ignored here. It's disappointing to see a decent plot spoiled by poor handling of delivery.

It's also possible to bypass a lot of the labyrinth and go straight to the final battle, as there isn't a driving reason to go to the elven and dwarven districts (such as collecting items needed to defeat the Alpha), and the available side-quests aren't as compelling as defeating the monster in the maze.

Given the resources available and the time it was produced in though, Fragments of Ferelden is a decent accomplishment. It's not the pinnacle of Dragon Age mods, but it gives an enjoyable few hours, and promises a lot from the next instalment.



### **STAR WARS:** CONQUEST Speeder&Vibroblade

MOD FOR Mount&Blade WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/swconquest

A VAST MODDING community has emerged since Mount&Blade was released in 2008, and now they've turned the game upside down in efforts to make it even better.

This full conversion includes speeder bikes, lightsabers, blaster rifles and plenty of Wookies. You can become a Sullustan soldier or a Jawa Jedi, a Rebel or Imperial - it's up to you.

The futuristic weapons have been well translated to the Mount&Blade

engine, and though the blaster shots drop like arrows, it's as good a representation of Star Wars combat as can be made in this engine.

There's a healthy dose of force powers included, but these seem to be slightly off. It's much more satisfying to run in lightsaber flailing than it is to sit at the back flinging lightning around.

Securing a decent crew will be your first instinct, and you'd do well to trust it, as there's nothing as embarrassing as squaring up to a mob of pirates with a

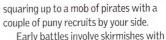
Blasters at

the ready!

Jawas, but sink a bit of time into this game and you're going to end up seeing two dozen Jedi slam into 200 droids.

enough to keep you interested, but there's also a custom battles mode included. You can play through pre-made scenarios, like the boarding a ship, or create your own vast skirmishes.

You may not lead cavalry into battle here, but this mod is worth a go.



The campaign mode is more than

### **CLEAR SKY COMPLETE 2010 Head back into a prettier Zone**

MOD FOR STALKER: Clear Sky WEBSITE moddb.com/mods/clear-sky-complete

**FOLLOWING IN THE** footsteps of *STALKER* Complete (snipurl.com/stalkercomplete) for Shadow of Chernobyl, Clear Sky Complete 2010 gives STALKER: Clear Sky a makeover, adding to its graphical punch.

This is a hefty update and you're going to need a high-end PC to get the most out of it. If you're having frame rate issues, you may have to turn down sun quality, SSAO (Screen Space Ambient Occlusion for the Wandies out there) and antialiasing. This allows you to run the game at a significantly smoother speed, while maintaining the intended graphical boost.

The biggest change you'll notice is a new set of distant scenery textures. These give the sense of being in a huge open world, which is a necessity in a game where your environment is everything. You'll also find prettier lighting, and a heap of other

This project includes not only graphical boosts, but also nearly 100 new songs, that were recorded for the mod.

While Complete 2010 retains the original's gameplay, it includes some fixes of minor faults. The biggest of these is reducing the amount of grenades NPCs have to stop them bombarding you, and slight



changes to bandages and medkits, to deal with the original's excessive bleeding.

Clear Sky Complete is perfect if you loved the original game, but the dreary visuals got you down. Alongside the beautified landscape, the gameplay tweaks certainly make this a worthwhile download.

## **BADWATER BASIN PAYLOAD**

#### Blow those zombies to hell

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 WEBSITE snipurl.com/bbpayload

**DESIGNED AS AN** example campaign for developers and to test out ideas, Badwater Basin Payload fuses two game modes from Team Fortress 2 and Left 4 Dead 2: you must scavenge fuel to a cart, while beating back L4D2's zombie hordes.

As it stands, the campaign is more of an exploration of what's possible within



the L4D2 engine than a romp around TF2's Badwater map, and there are certain things that could be improved to make the experience more fluid. The earlier stages of the fight are difficult in comparison to the last stage, and towards the end there is a noticeable lack of Specials. The pacing needs improving, possibly by addressing the



rise and fall tension with some scripted events, perhaps by having specials guard certain areas. The core game mechanic has a lot of potential, and it's easy to see a more streamlined version of this becoming a real game mode. A Versus mode could well be interesting, with two teams battling to push (rather than fuel) the cart into each other's bases. It would be great to see this within the realm of the L4D2. Perhaps the Survivors could push a clapped out police car instead of fueling a cart.

With variations on the way the cart is propelled this could be made into a full campaign rather than just one map. It'll certainly be interesting to see how this develops. Who knows? Next we might see Counter-Strike with portals.





#### WHITE TEETH MOD FOR Dragon Age: Origins WEBSITE snipurl.com/dawhiteteeth

Are you a dental hygienist? Do offwhite teeth give you bad dreams? Does staring into Alistair's mouth horrify you? The modding community righted this universal and terrible wrong. Morrigan's gnashers will now be a lovely Vanilla Mist instead of bloody beige.

# **MULTI THEFT AUTO**

### Edward Fenning jetpacks into action

MOD FOR GTA: San Andreas WEBSITE mtavc.com

HERE HAVE BEEN mods to San Andreas before that have introduced multiplayer modes, an option that Rockstar bizarrely failed to include in their original release of the game on the PC.

Multi-Theft Auto goes beyond being a simple tweak to let people play together, instead serving as an entire online experience in its own right that's got seven years of development behind it. Think of it as the Garry's Mod for Grand

and weapon spawning at a whim for utter craziness on the sandbox servers. A 132-person jetpack battle really is something to behold, as is 32-a-side golf cart chicken. More often than not though there will just be a mad bunch of people in a variety of vehicles, either killing each other or doing stunts. Outside of this basic mode are a variety of sub-genres, from standard ideas like Race to wackier things like Role Play and Zombie Survival.

If you own a retail copy of San

you have the Steam version then some tinkering is required to get this mod running. Once it's ready, joining a game is relatively easy and streamlined, with a surprisingly large player base and many servers on the dedicated browser to choose from.

Once in a game it's not entirely clear how you should summon the vehicles and weapons as everyone else seems to be doing with consummate ease. This is down to not having a spawn menu. Instead, you have to know the Lua script

name of what you want and use the in-game console to spawn it manually.

Master the console commands and you've got a brilliant playground at your disposal to enjoy with others, that alone makes San Andreas worth purchasing if you haven't already.







### **EASTERN FRONT** Stalin-g the German Advance

MOD FOR Company of Heroes WEBSITE easternfront.org

WHENEVER THERE'S A World War II game that leaves out the Russians, somebody will make damn sure to put them in. When a game leaves out the French though, nobody seems to give a shit.

Eastern Front is an extensive mod that finally brings the Soviet Army to Company of Heroes, polished to such a standard you could mistake them for a THQ created faction.

Eastern Front acts as an expansion rather than a mod, providing Soviet

forces with their own unique models, skins, sounds, buildings, tech trees, maps and three doctrines.

Their play style is a breath of fresh air too, having units like the conscripts who cost no population, but have to share rifles and are prone to carrying out undisciplined rushing attacks.

Though lacking any solo missions they're compatible with multiplayer and single-player skirmishes, but the team has plans to introduce their own campaign in the future.





## TRIBAL WARS

### Don't cry over missing Tribes any longer

MOD FOR Enemy Territory: Quake Wars WEBSITE twars.org

**GOOD GAMES NEVER** truly die. They just get faithfully recreated as mods to more modern titles. Tribal Wars is an attempted recreation of the old Starsiege: Tribes game pitting light, medium and heavy classes against one another in a revival of the original game's speedy floating combat.

There are two maps recreated from the original using a capture-the-flag mode. All the old Tribes tactics are still

valid, so those who mastered skiing first time around will find it useful again.

The mod is in its early stages, yet there are no noticeable game-breaking bugs, and more maps are promised. The only hurdle is that there are few players, and more often than not none at all. If you're wanting a game of this it's best to organise it with some mates beforehand, that or try and wrangle some players from our own PC ZONE forums.

## 2 EVIL EYES

### And one morally ambiguous mouth

MOD FOR Left 4 Dead 2 WEBSITE snipurl.com/2evileyes

TRAINS, TANKS AND nauticalmobiles all make an appearance in this swampy campaign for Left 4 Dead 2. Most of the map has you going through a bog populated with sinister buildings, treetop walkways and downed planes that manages to maintain a variety of locations and be challenging for new and experienced players alike.

Mostly the map is bug free, apart from a few instances of Infected spawning in the sides of containers. It's mostly intuitive where to go, though there were occasions of confused backtracking over paths that could lead you in a circular route.

For those of you without human companions it's AI friendly, the only snafu happening at the mid-point where there's a boat to the safe room for you to ride. Once you perch on top of it and set

it going. AI allies will run along behind in the ankle deep waters. If you really want to at this point you could sing Lonely Island's ditty about how you're on a boat and doing a mermaid, before crying over how hollow and lonely you feel inside.

Weirdly, the most challenging moment happens in the penultimate part: crossing a misty bridge that splurges foes all over you and is narrower to navigate than the one in Parish.

The finale itself instead feels anticlimactic after this, as you're pretty much unthreatened due to the fact the Infected spawn a great distance away and have to cross open terrain to reach you, which leaves them pretty easy to aun down.

Don't let these things put you off though, as it's a solid campaign well worthy of a play.







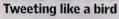
# Online Zone

What's new in PC ZONE's forum and Fight Club

Come and take on the Zone Staff in our monthly online gaming free-for-all!

A foray into Bad Company 2 brought much rejoicing and some gnashing of teeth. Elsewhere, Zone Chat was a wild change from the norm, with people actually taking part, and our other online appendages were oiled and ready enough to take on all comers. See what was said, what was thought and how we responded right here

# tw@tter





HOPE YOU'VE BEEN enjoying your StarCraft II beta keys. If not, you weren't following us on Twitter (or looking at our malnourished blog). If you had been, you might well have been able to snaffle one of the complex strings of letters and numbers that would enable you to access the game's pre-release build. It's all over now, so you've missed your chance.

It wasn't just free stuff, of course, unless you count the glorious words we spew out all the time. Actually, it pretty much was just StarCraft II. That and plugging the last issue. We did manage to scrape together a few seconds in order to viciously satirise the Digital Economy Act, comparing it to unscrupulous illegal loggers.

Finally, we have to mention regular reader Darth\_Careful, who lamented the fact he wasn't getting mentioned in the magazine. We're nice people here (apart from the one guy who isn't) so we thought, hey, let's give him what he wants. He also sent in a picture of himself, so if you want to point and laugh, or even fantasise about him covered in honey and doing an erotic dance, be our quests

If you want to get mentioned and/or ridiculed, why not send us an imploring tweet to us @pczone. Nudity optional.

# FIGHT CLUB PC ZONE are incredibly bad company

**OT ONLY DID** this month's Fight Club mark the debut of Bad Company 2 in our monthly scrap-off, but it was also the turns of editor Hogarty and staffer Brown to dip their toes into EA's buildingruining online FPS extravaganza for their very first time.

Bless their tootsies, they were only level zero going in, and halfway towards level one coming out. They never even got off the ground floor of this towering inferno of experience points and unlocks, despite pouring a whole evening into the game.

So, armed with their default weapons and heads swimming with confusion and spectacle, Hogarty and Brown (adopting their rap names of Boss Hogg and D-Bro) charged headfirst into the fray, supported and opposed in equal measures by PC ZONE readers who - as is Fight Club tradition - massively outclassed them.

Readers king\_clueless and yourevilclone took immense pleasure in popping open the skulls of the ZONE team and feasting on the delicious treasures within, while PCZ's very own work experience exploitee (and BC2 veteran) EGTF dragged the magazine's average to a halfway respectable place



on the board. This despite Hogarty and Brown's insistence on guad biking themselves off rooftops and under tank treads. Skraty, meanwhile, proudly claimed his 100th dog tag, a grotesque memento of a century of successful

The day after our online kerfuffle, in the sobering light of day, we approached Fight Club regular [Quite] Rob demanding to know how he'd felt to be part of such a rare and unique

monthly event: "Got raped hard by 40 mills and better players," he intoned, turning to face the middle-distance, a glimmer of regret in his eye that he'd said 'raped' and ruined the chance to show his gran his username printed in a mag. "I did manage to shotgun a sniper the other side of the map though lulz."

Lulz indeed - the length and breadth of these lulz were almost beyond words. Medic Hogarty took up residence on rooftops, and finding himself without even the most basic tools (these level zero yokels can't be trusted with defribbles and medipacks) instead opted to rain gunfire on the streets below, racking up a surprising number of kills before rampaging about the map in a tank and shouting about how brilliant games are.

Next month we'll be playing Bad Company 2 again - check out our Steam group for more information. In the meantime, search the server browser for "PC ZONE" to find our little corner of the internet. Who knows, you might even spot us there. Glimmering, incompetent demigods that we are.

#### "Hogarty and Brown charged headfirst into the fray"



## **NOTES FROM** THE FORUM

Do you think the new XCOM game will be a disaster or excitingly new?

THETINGLER: The rumour was Irrational being the developer, but it's actually 2K Marin, developers of BioShock 2. It's an FPS and it's on PC and Xbox 360, but is described as "exclusively on 360" when it's not. The website strongly suggests that it will be simply titled "XCOM".

**MUSICALGIBBON:** Seems like a fairly pointless attempt to take a unique series (albeit one that only really saw two decent releases) and turn it into the same thing as everything else.

ANDY MONAHAN: Do not want.

SUNSCRAMBLE: Ohhhh, that X-Com franchise, the X-Com: Enforcer thing. I thought for a moment you meant the Enemy Unknown/Terror From The Deep X-Com. Son... I am disappointed.

LIQUID\_METAL: A developer of a poor sequel to its predecessor plans to update a separate beloved isometric PC franchise in the form of an FPS to please console players who have never

heard of said game in the first place. This has never happened before.

CSDAVEUK: You never know. It might be as good as Deus Ex: Invisible War.

JONNY P66: Put some cheese on it, maybe wrap it in bacon, it'll be OK. I think the word 'sacrilege' is fairly appropriate for this turn of events. Or has this been tried before? What was X-Com: Enforcer?

SUNSCRAMBLE: Kotaku contributor and [horrendous expletives deleted] Luke Plunkett has done it once more, posting about why 2K did the right thing when they made X-COM into a FPS. Every single point he makes is either flat-out wrong, or plain stupid. As of time of posting, pretty much every single one of the many, many comments on his post are an ode to why the man is an idiot, and 2K are just plain wrong. My faith in gamers and humanity as a whole has just crept back up a tiny notch.

JOW00: Laaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaame.





A question was raised about Little Britain: The Game, whether it was worse than being molested by an old man. The general consensus seemed to be that being fondled by an octogenarian would be preferable to having to play that pile. Then, amazingly, somebody had the gall to suggest that PC Gamer was actually worth reading.

The tone of the evening changed substantially, jars of textual vitriol thrown in the direction of one Dave Lemon. Attempting to transcend the violence, the perplexingly named ^1EZ\_^2Bug^3z lamented his folly for spending all his money on clothes in Battlefield Heroes.

The equally bizarrely named [118]DHFTWOMFGBBQZOMLOL thought that was a good time to complain about Bad Company 2's rubbish server browser, and with that people dispersed into Fight Club, apart from Bigboy0007 who sat there on his own typing 'Poo' and 'Wee' a lot. Maybe it was a dirty protest. Against what is a mystery.



#### INI NIOL OT WOH

CZ). If you don't have Steam ast be ashamed of yourself, rst be ashamed of yoursel nd then download it from ut for announcements in that

#### CAN'T MAKE FIGHT CLUB?

If you find yourself unable to make it to Fight Club - perhaps you've become lodged inside a cannon while attempting a death-defying stunt then feel free to join other readers on the following public servers.

#### WHO'S WHO

Steve Hogarty [PCZ]misterbrilliant David Brown [PCZ]plughead Phil Wand [PCZ]peoplesfrontofjudea Jon Blyth [PCZ]loa Will Porter [PCZ]batsphinx

#### **BATTLEFIELD 2**

85.236.100.48:16567

COD 4: MODERN WARFARE 85.236.100.48:28960

COUNTER-STRIKE: SOURCE 85.236.100.48:27015

DAY OF DEFEAT: SOURCE 85.236.100.48:27315

#### HALF-LIFE 2: DEATHMATCH 85.236.100.48:27215

**TEAM FORTRESS 2** 85.236.100.48:27115

#### **BAD COMPANY 2**

Look for "PC ZONE" in the server browser. -

SERVERS PROVIDED BY ...



LOOKINGBACKRETROZONE

# Retrone Facing the wrong way since 1995...

Flashback

# OND GOOD

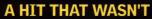
NCE A YEAR, Ubisoft hold an event called Ubidays. Like so many industry events, it's essentially a dick-waving exercise, and 2008's undulating penis show was notable for two main things. First, the misjudged use of Vernon Kaye as an MC. I'm sure he's a nice bloke but having him scream "I'm so addicted to GAMES," and genuinely

expecting a cheer, was mortifying for everyone involved.

The other thing that sticks out was the ripple of excited cheers that shot through the audience when people realised that the teaser trailer at the end of the show, was actually the Beyond Good and Evil sequel. Making a big deal about something that was a far bigger critical than commercial

success seemed brave, and uncommonly worthy.

Since then, there's been mealymouthed backtracking chat of preproduction, on-hold, and defensive bluster that the game was never officially announced, so how can it be technically cancelled? To which the correct response is "Sod off, it was the big reveal at an event you organised, remember? Stop being a semantic tool about it".



So, it looks like all we've got for now is the original game (available on Steam and Good Old Games). Luckily, it's charming enough to reward first-timers and historical snufflers alike. The pretentious title sounds like something Peter Molyneux would cook up, but there's none of that in the game - we start off with a battle against a plant, relax with a bit of nature photography, before getting embroiled in a speedboat race and some platform puzzling.

BGE attempted - and pulled off what Tim Schafer was trying to pull off with Brütal Legend: something to all people. Another similarity is the tepid reception: while Beyond was loved by journalists, there's something about a game that does more than one thing that's hard to passionately explain. These days people buy soundbites and quick pitches, and Beyond Good and Evil defiantly resisted a quick and cheap summary.

Jade's famous

dirty protest.



#### But how? You Pey'J your money

You takes your choice: Beyond Good and Evil is recent enough to be commercially available. It's on Steam for £5 and gog. com for \$10, although they both work about at about the same amount once you've added VAT to Steam's price and translated the dollars back down into real money.

There's no question of us guiding you towards pirate sites for a game that's for sale, and if you're the kind of tight-fisted bastard that won't fork out a fiver for one of 2003's loveliest experiences then you deserve to have five guids worth of food ripped out of your stomach and jammed into a starving developer's shocked mouth.

### **The Characters** The friends and foe of a photographer



JADE A green-lipped photojournalist, and the first love of several optimistic gamers



PEY'J The affable pig that brings a cheer from crowds of journalists, and makes you feel bad about bacon



**DOUBLE H** A manual quoting, facially deformed, ex-soldier who's a full H short of a wrestling match.



HIGH PRIEST DOMZ The strangely named character who let you know it was a French game.



**GENERAL KEHCK** The nasty guy behind BGE's nasty things. General Kehck, you're pants! That's what I say to myself, anyway.



**SECUNDO** A Spanish AI who can't pronounce his Js, and lives inside Jade's backpack. As AIs are prone to do.

## Now & Then

## JUST CAUSE 2 vs JUST CAUSE



ANY REVIEW OF Just Cause 2 is subject to certain obligations. It has to start with an introduction, where we shoehorn bits of our personal life into the review, so we can make ourselves sound compelling and erotic. Then we'll tell you how good the graphics are, use the phrase "in gameplay terms" a few times, and finish off with a thrilling number.

But with Just Cause, the only question people wanted to know the answer to was where have they put the strippers this time? Inside a volcano took some beating, but we really think they pulled something out of the bag with having them on a floating island. Where next? Might we suggest hurtling through space in nothing but a helmet? Or how about miniaturised, inside the mouth of a pensioner? Come on, Just Cause 3 - we need to know.



### Play it! How to play a game that's over three years old!

Just Cause might not seem retro. But it's at times like these you've got to sit back and ask yourself: exactly what does 'retro' mean to me? A game that came out in 2006? Good.

You can get the original off Steam if you like. It's £8.99 there, and once you're tired of that you can move on to the sequel, also on Steam for... let's see... £29.99! Christ.

But we're not Steam biased! Oh no! You can also grab the original off Direct2Drive for £9.95 - which works out pretty much the same as Steam's deal when you do VAT on it.

Where else does it? None other than Amazon.co.uk of course, and for a mere £7.90! The best deal yet! And for that you get a box and a disc and a manual and everything!

#### MAMEframe

## ONDER BOY

THE USE OF constantly dwindling health as a method of getting you to pump more coins into the slot was first seen in Gauntlet, but Wonder Boy used the same effect to keep you panicking and prone to mistakes.

It seems Wonder Boy is a medical marvel, requiring upwards of six pieces of fruit a minute, simply to avoid dying of starvation.

So, this game is really a simple matter of memorise-and-dash platforming. Luckily for MAME users, and '80s children with bottomless pockets, Wonder Boy let you continue any number of times, so there's no excuse to not have completed it.

Unless you've chewed your knuckles off and no longer have control over your carpal phalanges. That's a pretty good excuse.





runs over 3,500 games. You can get it from mamedev.org or from this issue's DVD (we've also got 32 and 64-bit versions of MameUI, which has a nice interface). But downloading games for it is illegal. So don't





### Time Trump

# **THE WORST OF...** ISSUE 122 – DEC 2002

THE PROBLEM WITH nostalgia is that it's rose-tinted and one-sided. Sure, UT2K3, Empire Earth, Arx Fatalis and Stronghold: Crusader came out in late 2002, but now you can get the full 3D effect by slipping one brown lens into your time-spectacles...

#### **BATMAN: VENGEANCE** SCORED: 42%

Pre-Arkham washout

"The fact that it tries to imitate Metal Gear Solid and fails, doesn't help. Horribly trite, unfair, and nowhere near excellent'

#### **CASINO EMPIRE**

SCORED: 39%

Template Tycoon

"In the UK, you can walk into a pub and gash £20 into a fruity. That'd be a better idea than wasting it on this."

#### **SHADOW FLARE**

SCORED: 28%

Another Diablo clone "No innovation, no fun, and no point."

#### LEGION

SCORED: 25%

'Take Civilization and strip it of its depth and complexity. Then take Age of Empires II, and simplify the combat so you don't have to do anything. What you're left with is Legion."

### Back In The Day

# FATALIS

Jon 'Log' Blyth gestures his way out of a paper bag

**DEVELOPER** Arkane Studios **PUBLISHER** JoWood Productions **RELEASED** 2002

HERE'S PLENTY THAT can go wrong in the first few minutes of Arx Fatalis. I know, I've been exhaustively inept in mastering the system.

First of all, it takes a few minutes to get used to swapping between cursor mode, look mode, combat mode, and spellcasting mode. It's the kind of control system that multi-platform development has wiped out, as you just couldn't do this on a gamepad. So there's a nostalgic PC twang to Arx Fatalis, beyond its traditional RPG statistics and low polygon count - it's the kind of game we'll probably never see again. And while I'm glad it's still around, I'm not sure that never seeing its like again would be a bad thing.

First off, gestures. These were done just about right by Black & White two

years earlier. But before I even got a chance to try and cast the ignite spell, the system asked me to put the runes in my magic book. Knowing how computer games work, I dragged the rune to my spellbook icon, and it disappeared. It was not in my book, not on the floor, or anywhere to be seen in the dark room. Of course, I might have been able to find it if I had some light – but that was the next part of the tutorial – use the rune to light a torch. Seethe. Restart.

#### **RUNED GAMING**

Next time, I followed the instructions, and still found myself unable to cast a spell. That's because I couldn't draw a lidless box to the satisfaction of the game's gesture recognition program. Assuming my barbarian build didn't have the spellcasting ability, I seethed to myself, and restarted. It made no difference, but I got lucky enough times to get me through the next couple of hours.

The Elder Scrolls series has moved the role-playing genre on so far that going back to Arx Fatalis was definitely a matter of undoing your expectations.

Why sword comparison websites started up.



#### Arkane Studios Welcome To The Lyon's Den

Arx Fatalis was French developer Arkane's first game, and was a faithful enough homage to Ultima to win them friends in the fantasy world. So, their next game saw them adopted by Might & Magic, with Dark Messiah released a full four years later. This was M&M's attempt to sex itself up - it was beginning to feel a little old-school, even with Heroes dabbling in the RTS arena.

With levels that were deathtraps for the clumsy, Dark Messiah relied on rather

unsubtle environmental weapons to despatch your enemies. It's one of the few games to feature beds of lethal spikes propped up against 50% of the world's walls.

That said, it lent an exciting edge of playful physics and hands-on visceral combat to the world of melee, ranged and spell combat. There was more than one way to play every level, even if you did kick a lot of people into a lot of spikes



Arkane's next project was The Crossing an ambitious game that fell foul of financia problems, and the adage I've just invented: If, when you try to describe a game to someone who loves games, and they reply "Eh? How's that work, then?" then you're going to have a bastard of a time selling it to businessmen.

Static: a danger of

polyester robes

Since then, Arkane have helped out 2K Marin with BioShock 2's level design, which looks good on your CV. With any luck, they'll get a project of their own again soon.









It's also refreshing to go back to character-rolling basics. Creating your character lets you choose four main stats, broadly selecting how strong, magical, precise and hardy your character is, and nine sub-stats, which effect thief-like actions such as stealth,

However, once you get past the idiosyncracies of its system, it becomes a game that's very easy to warm to.

Yes, the script is translated and awful (a goblin attempting to kill you with a club asks you to "get lost"), and your role as an amnesiac prisoner couldn't be more hackneyed - but the story and the world it plays out in are genuinely interesting.

#### **OLD CHESTNUTS**

The underground would you inhabit was built by an unlikely alliance of trolls, goblins, rat people and humans unified by the death of the sun. Forced into underground warrens to use the heat of the planet to survive, the old divisions soon crept back in. Nothing's sacred even the narrator gets killed, halfway through his introduction.

lock-picking and trap-noticing, insights into monsters and objects, and boosts to the complexity of magic you can cast.

All bitches aside, once you've mastered the controls and learned the peculiarities of the game's controls, Arx Fatalis is a bit of a flawed, dusty gem. A gem that needs a bit of attention, maybe. And a gem that'll piss you off a bit. And certainly, it's a gem with shit dialogue. But for anyone with a history of PC gaming behind them, it's a traipse that'll take you down some halfforgotten mental corridors. PCZ

"Past the idiosyncracies of its system, it becomes a game that's very easy to warm to"



**LOOKINGBACKPCZHARDDRIVE** 

# On the PCZ Hard Drive

The games we're playing and why we're playing them

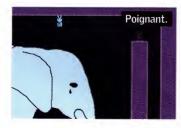




#### Consonanted: Jon 'Log' Blyth

**EFORE I PRAISE VVVVVV,** I should explain where I'm not coming from. I'm not coming from a rear-facing world of denial, in which the last great game was Jet Set Willy. I've written Retro Zone for three years: I know that the past is a disappointing place.

So, 6V should plug directly into that constantly disappointed bit of my brain.



It should be a distraction, a sigh of recognition, a flush of brief happiness as I briefly remember the childhood friends I don't talk to any more, before a shapeless half-deflated feeling of loss and mortality lands on my face.

But it's not like that. I've no doubt 6V would have landed a gold medal in Zzap! It would have warranted a double-page pull-out map, and I'd have left the amazing music on in the background, the same way I did with Monty On The Run. But this isn't straight nostalgia, it's a short and highly compelling game.

With fantastic chip music, simple controls, and rooms with names that make your heart swell hot, VVVVVV slams its charm hard into you. It's difficult not to love the

main character, who's mindlessly happy in the face of repeated death. But the deaths are so fast, and the restarts so instant, that you don't get a chance to stop playing.

And the final dose of intelligence and charm is in the flexibility wrung out of the basic three-button control system. All you can do is move and rescue your crew is move left and right and swap

gravity. A stifling system that the tiny team manages to find enough variety to carry you through the two to three hours VVVVVV lasts.

The optional trinket missions and time trial modes are great bonuses, but even with them, I'd be forced to admit that VVVVVV isn't very long. And I'll happily concede that it's optimistically priced. You might paraphrase that as "too expensive". I'd shrug and tell you to dedicate your life to making a game, if you're so great.

Read between the lines...

I hope VVVVVV makes enough money to convince these guys to make another game, because I want to see what they make next.

**VERDICT:** Flipping brilliant

# BATTLEFIELD: BAD COMPANY 2

Bad Medicine: Edward Fennina

LET ME TELL you how much I've come to hate Medics. I trust my three year-old cousin to perform first aid better, compared to these guys that throw down a magic box and hope it heals people some 10 meters away. Maybe they believe positive vibes can stem bleeding.

That's not even beginning to cover their misuse of defibrillators, where 1,000 volts to the heart apparently cures death by bullets to the face. But don't let such incompetence fool you, they're an extremely deadly juggernaut class. They could easily outgun me with M60s, plus if there was more than one

they would keep zapping each other back to life.

To calm down I needed my Dicaprio fix, so went and watched Gangs of New York again. Seeing the fight scene at the end it came to me: smoke! Now I have a new tactic for Medic menaces. When I see a group of them huddling together I blanket the area with smoke grenades, before running into the gloom and stabbing them, only to vanish again afterwards.

Prescribing a knife to their backs has done wonders in curing my frustration at these gits.

**VERDICT:** Nurse! Suction!









## **WORLD BASKETBALL MANAGER 2010**

Off the Rim: David Brown

#### WHILE SPORTS MANAGEMENT

games don't necessarily need wonderful graphics or exciting 3D match engines, it's good to have something pleasant to look at during the hours you invest into them. Even Football Manager has gone down the visuals road now, so to play World Basketball Manager 2010 is like

stepping back into the dark ages in a very, very bad way.

Judge how accurate the game is at simulating the work of a basketball coach is difficult, because every time a match was initiated, the game would display an error and stop. So this is a basketball management game that you can't even look at the text highlights

The closest you'll

get to a match.

in. That's not the most inspirational thing to say about a game, is it? Just running through a slow-running glorified text adventure clicking "Simulate" a lot surely isn't anyone's

The whole point of basketball is that you get involved with the substitutions, create a playbook and all that sort of thing, so to be denied it all (there was no play creation option to be seen) is a kick in the proverbials. The interface is utterly horrible and counter-intuitive as well - just accessing your squad is frustratingly fiddly. There's no excuse for the design flaws shown here, and it makes you appreciate fully how well made games like Football Manager are. So yeah, you could say this isn't the game of choice for lunch breaks.

**VERDICT:** Benched

Readers on their chosen poison

#### **ALIENS VS PREDATOR**

It is a great game, but I've concerns about the length of the single player missions. Whilst the graphics are first rate and the weapons have obviously been well thought out, I just feel slightly cheated over how short it was.

#### **DRAGON AGE: ORIGINS**

This is going to be the one that swallows up a whole year like Baldur's Gate II did. I'll start drafting a goodbye note to my girlfriend now.

**G\_Hughes** 

#### **METRO 2033**

I thought the game wa brilliant. It's one of those games that you can complete in a weekend, but can play through it again in different ways WonkoTheShit





### **LOOKINGBACKCOMMENTARY**

# **BIOSHOCK 2**

#### Will Porter puts on a dress and a creepy girly voice

**NE THING WE** know about Will Porter is that he loves the BioShock games, so when we were asked to supply somebody to sit in a room with Jordan Thomas, creative director at 2K Marin, and question him about BioShock 2, there was only one name that could have possibly have passed our lips. So it was that the excited Mr Porter found himself pumping Thomas for information on Daddies big and Sisters little (and big).

There were so many sentences and words to listen to, the poor work experience lad who transcribed the interview broke down in tears and fled the building, his poorly constructed headphones still plastered to his sweat-matted hair.

Fortunately for us, we managed to retrieve the following spoiler-peppered words for your delectation. The rest of them will be in next month's issue if we can coax the workie out of the tree with a blueberry muffin.



Jordan Thomas Creative Director, 2K Marin

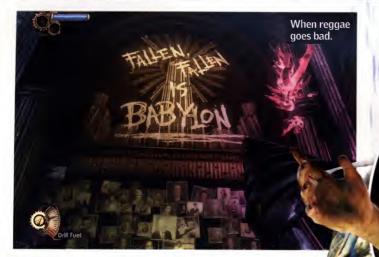
#### **PART** ONE

#### 01 PARALLEL UNIVERSE

"Originally the game was a hybrid, there were a number of playable flashbacks, which had a prequellike flavour, but were much more subjective, like memories that you were uncovering. But they were terrible. What Rapture was like in its heyday appeals on paper, but it meant you really couldn't play the game. Players sleepwalked through each scene, which was pretty, but not particularly convincing.

"We spent a lot of time on that because it was something that I very much wanted to do, but it just didn't make sense. It would've been such a radically different game that we couldn't really call it BioShock any more. Anybody who came from the original would be saying like, 'What about the gameplay?! I liked that too."





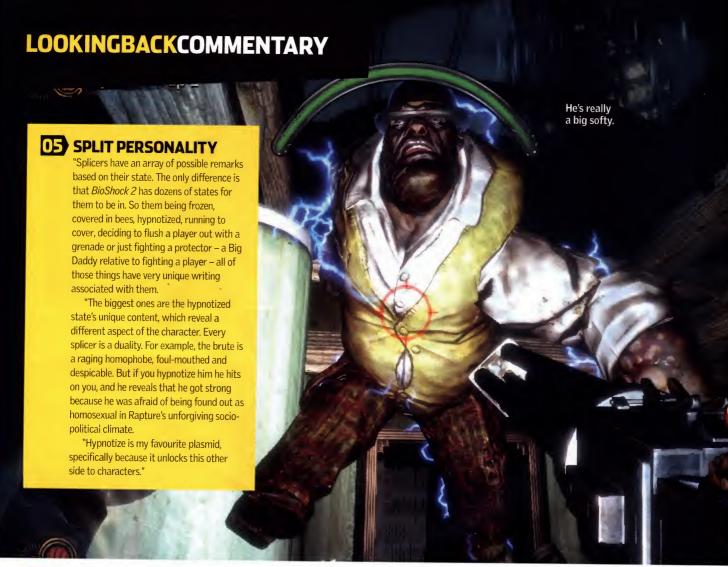
#### **02** ONE TRICK PONY

"I knew that the people who came back expecting a giant twist, and would be disappointed with it's lack. But I also feel like repeating that formulaic kind of Shyamalan-style of one-trick storytelling would have led to people saying BioShock 2 was a carbon copy of the first game.

"Frankly, I was much more interested in doing the opposite of 'Would you kindly...', zooming out to show your effects on the world in a way that you didn't anticipate, than to pull another 'Gotcha!'."

Those white contact





#### **06** MUTTON CHOPS

"Originally, the Big Sister was an unique character who you fought as frequently as you do now, but couldn't defeat. And back then Eleanor was the Big Sister. A couple of things irritated me about that: she was too far gone, your input wouldn't lead to anything, she was too fragmented, and had already done too many terrible things for you to feel like you had done much.

"Another thing was that it felt like a bad twist in the sense that 'Ooh, the Big Sister was your Little Sister,' and that was never the intent. Dramatically it had to be that way, because it had to feel like she was the antagonist at first. So a combination of pressures led to that shift to multiple Big Sisters as enforcers and Eleanor taking up the mantle later.

"I'm definitely happier with how it turned out, but I've learned my lesson with telling too much early on. With any mystery game I work on in the future, I'm going to be super reticent with details."





#### **DADDY COOL**

"No amount of talking about prototypes, agility and being more of a guy in a suit from way back in the line is enough to disassociate 'Big Daddy' from 'slow' and 'completely immortal'. Frankly if we had made a game around a traditional Big Daddy, it would've been fun for an hour before you realized you're just going to be lumbering down a corridor and killing everything. There's no challenge there.

"I feel that a lesson of *BioShock 2* is that the associations people make with the character – 'Will I be slow? Will I be immortal?' – are going to be the subjective experience of anyone returning to play that character. Convincing them otherwise is a challenge which we could have dealt with elsewhere, but the story was so fundamental to that bond that it's hard to see this particular game as any other form."

#### **DUAL SHOCK**

"Introducing Rapture as a setting is daunting in comparison to most games. BioShock had a two-audience challenge: increasing the number of people that are interested in BioShock was a goal, and so we had to make

sure this game would introduce you to Rapture, Ryan and some of the core concepts again.

"The fans coming back would be familiar with all that, and so the layering references and skewing the tutorial, giving a child's eye view of Rapture with Ryan Amusements for example, became a goal, as we wanted to keep veterans interested while getting the huge payload of concepts delivered to them."



## REFERENTIAL TREATMENT

"There's a fair amount of stuff in the Big Daddy/Little Sister lore that overlapped with the first game, like references to guys like Suchong who were pivotal in their creation. But we focused on the player, like when Splicers debated what Jack did.

"Not everybody catches this because it's in the telekinesis plasmid tutorial. There's an argument going on between three splicers, one of whom says that Jack rescued a bunch of Little Sisters, went back to the surface and is a pansy. The second one one believes he's topside drinking highballs. And then a third says, it doesn't matter where he is - he's gone.

"Those are the three things that you need to know: splicers don't know what Jack really did, they think he did different things, and that now he's out of the picture it's leaving a power gap. That sets the stage for what happens."

"Splicers don't know what Jack really did"

Doherty's looking much better these days.





### **LOOKINGBACKNEVERQUEST**

**STEVE HILL'S** 

# **NEVERQUEST**

Steve Hill boldly goes upstairs and plays Star Trek Online...

Space is a

lonely place.

EVER SEEN IT. By 'it,' I mean new Star Trek. By 'new,' I mean anything not involving **Shatner and Nimoy mincing around** an unconvincing Technicolor set. It's not a particularly idle boast, but I've never sat through an episode of Next Generation, Deep Space 9, Voyager, or whatever other nonsense lurks out there. I regard people who deify such things with the same contempt reserved for real ale enthusiasts and men who know what 'torque' means.

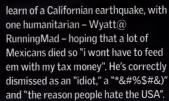
I once worked with a sarcastic Star Trek fan who genuinely didn't believe that I couldn't reel off the Enterprise's number plate. As far I'm concerned, "Trekkie" is an insult, as once witnessed at an England match when a tattooed brute memorably yelled "Sit down you fucking Trekkie!" at the weedy bespectacled man obscuring his view.

good stead during my early forays into Star Trek Online, when I find myself defending the good guys from a Borg attack and eventually destroy their home cube.

It was some of the least fun I've ever had, the main entertainment coming from the fact that I'm sporting a vintage Paul Presley ponytail, which makes me look more like a Status Quo roadie than the captain of a star ship. All the same, I'm promoted to the bridge of the USS Zone and informed that the fate of the galaxy rests in my hands.

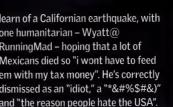
#### HILL IN SPAAAACE!

However, space travel is rarely as dramatic as it is in the movies, and one of my initial tasks involves talking to somebody called Malcolm. He's quite



Meanwhile, my burgeoning relationship with the taciturn D Mac sees us head out on a two-man mission to rescue a stricken freighter and escort it to a station.

Having found the freighter, I ask my colleague if he knows where the station is. Breaking his silence, he suggests, "There may be something the other way.



Following him across great tracts of empty space, gingerly leading the freighter by the nose, there's a sense of tranquillity, just me and Daddy Mac, taking care of business.

"This is slightly dull," I say. He says nothing.



#### JIM? HE'S DEAD

Breaking up the beautiful partnership. I beam down to Vulcan where all is brown. A brown stairway, flanked by brown statues, leads to a door. It doesn't open. Nothing happens. Nobody speaks. Chancing my arm elsewhere, I beam down to an ice planet where bare knuckle fighting is encouraged. I'm offered refreshments while watching the duel. The duel never starts.

Inspired by my experience of *Star* Trek, I rummage through my roomful of free stuff and unearth an untouched VHS copy of Star Trek: Generations, clocking in at a challenging 113 minutes. I watch it alone. Turns out Kirk's dead. Who knew?

#### "Space travel is rarely as dramatic as it is in the movies"

Despite my wilful ignorance of warps, cores, and tribbles, this much I've learned through osmosis: Klingons have a piecrust embedded in their foreheads and speak Welsh, and the Borg live in a cube and assimilate people. The latter factoid holds me in

Finally unleashed into deep space, I team up with a fellow newbie, D Mac of the USS Corax. Between us, we destroy some Syndicate Drydocks.

"Good job," I say.

D Mac says nothing.

Elsewhere a discussion breaks out on the merits of Michael Bolton. I also



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# 6055 WITH JESSICA TOLSTOY

I! I'M JESSICA TOLSTOY, Hollywood gossip duchess. I'm here to give your dowdy old games industry a triple-whammy of glamour and celebrity boomshackalack. Every entertainment industry thrives on gossip, so stop pretending you're more interested in playing ridiculous 'videogames' than hearing about what people more beautiful than you get up to. Tip back your head, and let my rumour syrup trickle into your gullet!



**WATER DICK!** 

ASSASSIN'S CREED 2 could have

spun around like Wonder Woman,

knocking things off shelves, making a crazy high-pitched scream." Time-bomb

Wallace confesses that he sometimes

keeps a bottle of

water with him. And

a good thing, too!

## **WARD BOYS SNUB**

**CRAZY DAYS OVER** at Infinity Ward! After their leaders' morale-busting firing/walkout/whatever and staff haemorrhage, there've been explosive revelations that Jennifer Aniston has driven past the Infinity Ward offices in what commentators are describing as

a brutal snub! "She didn't even look in." said a close friend of

the company.

"She was probably thinking about Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie having an acrobatic sex session beyond the realms of non-celebrity imagination."

Sad staff are still reeling from the blow, as some of them probably quite liked that episode of Friends where Joev had his head inside a turkey.



Riding a snowmobile makes Jennifer wet.



#### S&M-ETHESDA ARE STAB-STABBY HAPPY!

AND THAT'S NOT all, from the shadowy umbrella of ZeniMax! Jean-Luc Picard has caused ripples in the LA party circuit by recounting tales of routine genital mutilation and unnecessary surgical procedures in the Bethesda offices. "They just ran

around stabbing each other as far as I could see. There was no sense to it. I mean, I could understand it if there were territorial disputes or mating rights to be established, but they just seemed to get off on the feel of stirring another man's guts with a blade."



#### **MICKEY ROURKE MAY**

have just finished recording the voice of murderhouse Dick Marcinko, but my insiders at the company report him making a series of juicy phone calls while he was there! "He seemed slightly grumpy during these calls, almost like he was having a covert affair with the person he was talking to. It's possible he is having a powder-keg kneetrembler with Judy Finnegan, featuring a number of degrading role-play scenarios in which Mickey is gaffer-taped to the ceiling and iabbed with broom handles."





#### IT WASN'T THE ONE ON THE LEFT!

I'M GETTING REPORTS that one of the people named in FIFA Online, mentioning no names, is texting gay pictures of his down-belows to beautiful female women. This highly homoerotic picture of two big balls and a penis could be used by a gay man - if he were to ever see it - to

fuel a sordid montage of public masturbation, leading to a shocking indecency arrest. This is just the kind of juicy gay public masturbation phone sex scandal that EA will be hoping to avoid, in the testosteronespattered world of games about international soccer.

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**Everything you need to know** about StarCraft II in the run up to the launch of the biggest strategy game of the decade.

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First hands-on with the casino-raiding Fallout spin-off!

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